

THOUGHT OF THOUGHTS

BOOK ONE: BE-LIE-VE



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Book One: BE-LIE-VE

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Book I: *Be-lie-ve*

Book 2: *Trespassing*

Book 3: *Perhappiness*

Book 4: *Flat Solids*

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1: PHOTOGLYPHS

The allegorical form of art can train and possibly awaken the mind with piercing glimpses into the inexplicable, expressing it in its visual meta-language. For that purpose, Zen masters used to employ their koans; similarly, we used our concepts. Art was always our thread of Ariadne that led us through the labyrinths of life: as in Russia, so in America. The running streams of ideas and forms in our art have been fusing in one organic union, whose balance is maintained as in a live organism. On every occasion, it was necessary to rise in consciousness above the limitations of the moment, to break free from the temporal aspects of events and to glance from the particular to the universal – in such case geographical localities become less significant than expected. The surviving idea of antiquity concerning the necessity of self-knowledge (*nosce te ipsum*) suggests that one has to gain the maximum independence from the collective mind, which entails another equally old rule that one has to carry in himself all that one needs (*omnia mea mecum porto.*) Consequently, these parables were repeated in our life just like in lives of many others who traveled the same way before us.

The “art” of transfiguring oneself daily inspires and gives wings to creativity, fortifying life against fate. And what is creativity, if not a combination of imagination and one’s own personality? So are our photoconcepts. Receiving their physiognomic stamp through this very amalgamation, they are embedded into something much more objective and powerful than self-expression, something that might be roughly attested as a fusion of visible and invisible reality. If one were to explore what is given indirectly by means of direct examples and let the ideas shine through one’s own being, there is no better way but to let yourself go and deal with the art forms as if with friends. To put it in somewhat saner words, we shifted the spotlight from conceptual object to conceptual subject so they coincided in a kind of living artwork. Under constant self-observation, it multiplied, bringing catalytic foresight into the concepts, their visual appearance and physical exposition. If hermeneutics is more demanding in terms of mental and spiritual resources, fine art

is suitable for comprehension of ordinary mortals. In fact, it helps to develop the beginnings of the wisdom that is implanted in the natural world.

A meditative approach adds to the unhurried quality of that visual story, which, in reality, is the story of the self-fertilizing processing of art into life, and vice versa. A vast array of ideas is seamlessly interwoven with consistent means of expression, the most dramatic of which is the use of the human face as both witness of performance and canvas for its representation. Done without apparent effort, *Photoglyphs* have a propensity towards the lightness and grace of children playing, while raising searching minds to seek not only their affairs in contradicting physical reality but also the deeper meaning behind them. Since there is no pole without its opposite, and truth cannot appear naked before the people, it must be guarded and evoked by indirect yet steady and balanced means. They are not of the same sort as spiritual distillation of human consciousness exercised by all kinds of gurus – through such, hopefully, one would pass unharmed. We are in the universe, but the path of return lies within. In the process of recovery of understanding of one's own nature and beyond it, art plays not the last role, especially when we look at it in a good moment. Then, the knowledge embedded in the form of immediate experience is endlessly revealing.

"In the beginning was the word." So it was in the case of *Photoglyphs* too. Words as symbols of thoughts can be taken as visual units, which leave room for multiple interpretations. True to its title, the series *Photoglyphs*, which literally means "carving with light" (in Greek *phos*-, *photos*- denotes "light," and *glyphe*- means "carving"), mainly features close-ups, with cryptographic words and drawings. We photographed the "chosen" words, inscribed on our faces between the eyes and brows, and on the forehead and neck, without verbal context. Skin was utilized as human parchment for the visual formulas. Deploying this curious organic metaphysics not within the "bookish" environment where it's usually encountered, but directly on our faces, we tried to transfer it to the realm of poetic truth. In this new context, words, developed from the flesh and blood of visual poetry, appeared in the fullness of their allusive meaning, not as faceless morphemes of a linear textual form. Presented right on our faces, the front pages of the mind, our thoughts thus became visible,



Aqua Vitae © 1989

recharged by the human features and expressions. Almost like visions that appear to the inner eye of the imagination, these manifested thoughts enabled us to articulate perennial ideas as we experienced them in ourselves.

Visual poetry involves not only wordplay but in a broader sense, it is choreography of verbal images. In *Aqua Vitae*, that intension is quite evident: the fluid, shapeless water assumes the form of rolling waves with words tossing on them. *Vita* has its beginnings in *aqua*; therefore, the word-for-word expression “*aqua vitae*” (water of life) faithfully reflects the origin of all formations. The precious event is dramatized on the background of the face, unintentionally recalling the first lines of Genesis, in which the beginning was marked as the moving “upon the face of the waters...” The vibrating lines depict the bottom of the procreative primary waters, from which emerge the fingers with the red inscription “*vita*.”

Below this point, the waves blur and smooth everything, unifying the features of the face with the outlines of the hands; they keep that symbolic great waters of chaos in a, so-called, state of humus, from which a release of potentiality is to be expected. The firmament is rising with the open eyes, and the forehead is turned into a field for the piercing action of the two horn-like “A’s,” the first letter of many alphabets, the alpha of the beginning. The word “aqua” looks like a pictorial sign of an ark tossed upon the surface of the waves. In an attempt to dignify the situation with poetry and the Scriptures, we may suggest its hypothetic parallel to that legendary Arc that carried those inside to a new firmament and a new phase of experience, leading them to their *Vita Nova*. Mind is a creative tool, always “vibrating” out vital concepts; the water and the saving arc are just an evidence of its traveling rather far in thought and mythology. Water mediates eternity with impermanence – *aqua* is always *vita*. No experience in the waters of life can be exactly repeated; no destiny can copy another. Like a wave, each individual life appears and then submerges into that water; speaking proverbially, all waves belong to the ocean, while the ocean does not belong to waves.



The mirror conundrum *Time-Emit* deploys a similar motif. “Emit” is written on the forehead, suggesting the seat of mental emission, while “time,” which appears in reverse, is inscribed on the glass surface, glistening with water droplets. In this way, “emit” flows into the upside-down “time,” much like the fading, and subsequent merging of energy into matter. It’s as if we unintentionally visualized the theory of relativity, depicting its link of emitting energy, mass, and time. After all, is man not swimming in their three-dimensional realm, like a fish in water? A fish is unaware of water; it just lives in its “here and now.” Time flows – and *tempora mutantur*. Everything changes. The *aqua vitae* remains an eternal puzzle: “Nobody can enter it twice,” posited Heraclitus. Moreover, added Paracelsus, “A fish taken out of water does not leave a hole in it.” In the same vein, another “truism” has coined itself in our imagina-



Emit © 1989

tion – water cannot be drowned.

Fish, one of our rare works in the Russian language, also manifests a relationship to water, but in its purifying sense. Infusing words with another impulse, we tried to make a picture of thoughts, which of itself might be a plentiful source for both knowledge and the imagination. Besides, visual language can conceal more than it reveals. Reduced to its hidden meaning, it might be impregnated with deeper significance, so that the Word can be heard behind the chorus of words. Certain mystical ideas require no interpretation; they seed themselves into man's consciousness if it's subtle and receptive enough. Such ideas might herald a certain type of knowledge, which in some way is more akin to faith. On that score, Albert Einstein's saying would not be out of place, "The finest emotion of which we are capable is the mystic emotion... and anyone who is a stranger to it is as good as dead."¹



Gerlovina, Berghash, Gerlovin, *Fish* © 1987. "Reality laziness and Echrista are preordained" reads with different intervals as "appearance of Jesus before people."

If one is capable of noticing things hidden behind other things, as well as their mutual interchange, all phenomena begin to appear as part of a single multiplex. The flat land of one meaning is absorbed into the genuine fullness. However circumstances combine to hasten it, no one can receive from without what can only come from within. In that light, the composition *Real* is photographed literally under the veil of reality: the word "real" is shown not in the usual linear manner, but as a three-dimensional configuration. With its seemingly loose ends, the living principle is never static; it's pacing like the human mind, which is perpetually in the motion of thought. Expressing that concept on the face, we joined the abstract idea with its mental equivalent, giving "evidence" of its physical presence. Reality is thus seen

behind the veil – a veil that's often of our own creation, perhaps made of hair, or weaved of thoughts. In any case, for the average person “reality” remains a hazy concept, a gross material dream that turns the wheel of the world. For it is difficult, even troublesome to open insight into the *heart of the matter*, especially for those content to live only on its surface. It's only when we awaken from a dream that we know that we've been dreaming. It might take many circles of pacing in this virtual reality before the thought of waking even starts to make its way through the twilight activity of the mind.

Reverting to some general ideas that have formed our art, we have to step aside to view historically how all these concepts were seeded. The past is already sealed by time, but the reflections on our beginning that caused the ensuing chain of effects are still very much alive. Akin to mythological patterns, which transmit culturally rooted ideas, even those

Real © 1989



early works made in Russia seem to be cross-cultural at their core, exactly as providence deemed our lives to become. Nourished by fertile conceptual sights, we worked together and separately; by keeping independence, we seemed to be “one another.” In any combination, the artworks were united on the same basis: they talk on the language of coded simplicity. In other words, the message ought to have sense of brevity and preciseness of idea. We have come to realize that art has to be both brief and long at the same time: brief in form and long in impact. The subtleties of ideas when they are endowed with the poverty of the means make imagination working so much more effectively. The “uniting us” approach was ruled by mythological and philosophical ideas; meanwhile each personal style and methodology matured independently.

That is how it came to pass. Rimma developed her language of three-dimensional poetry – namely the cubes – that grew later into the large cubic organisms and cubic environments, finally turning into the circles. Valeriy was occupied with the idea of the syncretism of “live and dead” materials, which included earth, bread, wood, mosaics from syringes and, most important, metal. All these descriptions can be shortened into some sort of creative formula behind our art: if Rimma was versatile predominantly with the word-concepts, Valeriy was at home with the archetypal forms, as if she employed the algebraic method of conceptualism, while he preferred the geometrical one. In terms of our early Moscow performances, they served as a preamble for our joint work on photoconcepts in the American period. Consequently, our united “sentence” in art was simultaneously compound and complex. After leaving Russia in 1979, gradually we began to separate from the collective body of, figuratively speaking, social Leviathan, while accumulating transpersonal, perhaps, transcendental impulses in language of our art. The new cycle of our artwork, both the circle-shaped sculptures and the following *photomorgana*, appeared as indicators of that transformation, in which our interest towards ancient philosophical sources of the East and the West helped us to unify the facts of our own consciousness with our art. The works intersect conceptually not only in time, in form, and between us; they appear as creative marks of the impending experience that is neither purely physical



The artists with their works, Moscow, 1977. Photo: Igor Makarevich



nor merely metaphysical, but both. Artists sense material, while theoreticians comprehend mentally; uniting both approaches, we tried to dwell on the essential rather than circumstantial and use the imaginary connected to transcultural ideas.

Thus, the series *Photoglyphs* was made at the crossroads of various genres, summarizing certain tendencies in our art that closely relate to the whole sequence of “perhappenings” in our lives. That collaborative opus reflects each of our practices and concerns: the close-up technique and the metal reliefs derived from Valeriy’s murals and metal sculptures, whereas the visual poetry came from Rimma’s cubes and circles. The residue of all of our previous creative efforts, their essence and significance, was now displayed to us through the magnifying eye of photography. Thus, renewed by this new approach (with the help of the camera), diverse photographic concepts gushed forth like an allegorical fountain of ideas. Consequently, we became less and less interested in making objects and in performing. Our performances now became “still.”

Compressing meaning into a symbol, we wanted to look not at the object, but through and beyond it. With time, different pictorial concepts grew into elaborate series, the connec-

An Organic Union, retrospective exhibition at Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, Hempstead, NY, 1991. (Left) metal sculptures by Valeriy Gerlovin, (right) joint work *Photoglyphs*





H₂O © 19890-94, in stainless steel construction, 48 x 48"

tions among which were as decisive as they were inexplicable, although the key principle behind them remained the same – how to make the world from oneself, rather than oneself being made by the world. Observing our own conditions and at the same time conditioning them, we were putting everything on the visual record, thereby creating an unbroken chain of several hundred images. Saturated with complex metaphorical meanings, the words and numbers in our *Still Performances* operate like *tableaux vivants*, showing not the dynamics of the body, but the mind, like a theater of consciousness with deviations into supra- and sub-conscious content.

The same ratio can be formulated through the vocabulary of art, philosophy, science, or even vocalized in musical relationships of tones and undertones. Dramatizing archetypal principals in photography, we seemed to co-play with their

tides more awake and responsive to their stimuli. Naturally, many allegories intersected in our artwork in quite different genres of which it would be easy to append some instances. After the concepts of magic square and tetraktys crystallized in Valeriy's metal reliefs, they found their way in photography; and the similar symphonic arrangements of numbers were soon to be inscribed on our skin. Their abstract messages were eventually humanized and received a personal touch. There they were enlivened through the faces and translated into art language. We were aware of them, partly through seeing them with our own eyes partly through number symbolism; that's how some dormant recollections might come to the fore. The world and ourselves are not borne out by ancient or recent statistics, therefore, what is presented here is not an untrue story simply because it violates certain scientific notions of what is possible and

Valeriy Gerlovin, *Tetraktys*,
1987, aluminum, 45 x 46 x 6"



what is probable.

Both the metal relief with the tetraktys (from *tetras*, four, Gr.) and the photograph show the paradigm of creation from one to ten, in which ten is a turning point of all counting, returning to the completeness and unity of one but on a higher octave. That harmonious pattern was revered by the cultivated Hellenes not less than the icons by the Orthodox Christians or the mandalas by the Buddhists. In the mind of the Pythagoreans, whose neophytes took their oath upon the tetraktys, it was not a merely intellectual concept, but represented an entire mystery behind the progression of the soul through a paradigm of creation.

Close to the tetraktys stands *Pascal Triangle* of endless probability, in which each number is a sum of numbers above, the sides always being one. Blaise Pascal happened to add some new properties to that otherwise ancient triangle

Tetraktys © 1989

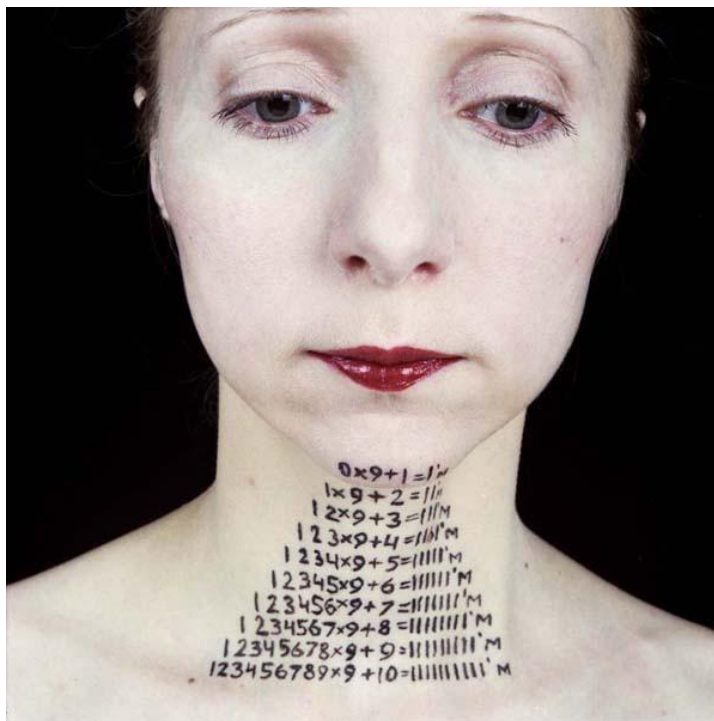


that we somewhat humanized and affixed a touch of mystery by letting it shine in darkness. The triangle can grow down continually... not unlike human life and life in general that keeps growing in years, attracting all kinds of events and buffets of fate. It was long ago recommended to calculate numbers *ad infinitum* for soothing the mind and feelings, especially if one's sensibilities were in excess of reason. Some comprehended truth by way of images, some by way of numbers while others described things as they happened. The truth of what was forecast by one was confirmed by events described by the other. In any way, it contains much, which might be termed as a priori knowledge.

The magic of numbers is addictive in itself. Sometimes, there is so much to tell, and nowhere to begin, as in the image *Sphinx*, which by itself is an example of a fascinating arithmetical consistency. If we multiply the perfect sequence of

Pascal Triangle © 1990





Sphinx © 1990

123456789 by 9 and add 10 we get an amazing line of ten ones – 1111111111. Intact with the inexhaustible logical oddities, we interpret inanimate digits as personalities: each 1 becomes “I”, each “I” wants to live, wants to be “I am.” Yes, life has its charms. Following that simple precept, all existential units are animated. What's next? In the multilayered process of life, everything is developing, so they are, multiplying and developing into a progression of I-am-ness, layers after layers. (Heaven forbid, one is to deviate, propelling into a multiple personality.) In a strange way, a singularity pluralizes out prodigiously, dimly reminiscent of the lofty expression *in pluribus Unum*, mundanely seen on the US currency. “I am” is “I am,” and however many they are, I am always. The chemistry of the individualization is hidden in the wholeness of oneness, in its repletion and completion in itself. Culling the universal from the particular, the final destination

of a progressing “I-am-ness” can be defined in one short sentence: there is no outside of the one being all.

Besides the digital choir, the fragmentary *Sphinx* employs one of the philosophical allegories of antiquity associated with the Ancient Egyptian stone figure near the pyramids of Gizeh. Those who simply cast a glance on this marvel cannot fail to notice this weird connection of the human head and the bestial body. In that context, the “valve,” located in the neck between a human head and the body of a lion, is the most emblematic. Time is wearing out objects and subjects while leaving us that enigma, which beginning and end are still contemporaneous. It cannot be encompassed with mere facets of human physiology, the neck or the brain, which remains unreliable as it was in days gone by. We would add here, in passing, that currently our mind has only “part-time employment” of its potential abilities. Yet, its role is undeni-

Pyramids ©1991



able in the interpretation of that Egyptian ambiguity. There is something more than meets the eye in the sphinxian depth and its blasphemous toleration of extremes. Inconceivable in ordinary terms, that something unites the conceptual numinous top with the brute physical bottom. Visually, the neck seems to play a role of a symbolic nexus between the above and the below; it is a narrow “isthmus” between the superior and the inferior, the invisible spirit and the physical body.

Symbolic of the transitory state of consciousness, the image of the Egyptian sphinx would be clear enough to those who are already in that transit. *The Gospel of Thomas* (7) talks about it rather explicitly: “Blessed is the lion which becomes man when consumed by man; and cursed is the man whom the lion consumes, and the lion becomes man.”² Thus, “stripping off” the gross fleshly garment, one has to put on another incorruptible one; both of them denoting a metaphysical principle, which prints the characteristic of the personality on the body, both the bestial and the humane, and, in the higher aspect, the earthly and the spiritual. There is yet another human type of mongrel that tries but not able to kill the animal inside oneself, for he himself would die with it. In the subtly reasoned Indian teaching, *Vishuddha* chakra is another parallel to the Ancient Egyptian and the Gnostic concepts of the transitional state. Located at the same region of the neck, it prevents and sifts the polluting influence from the lower to the higher. The speed of that sifting might be different, but the road is the same. Are we going too fast in those conclusions? Perhaps, but that is the major subject, all other thoughts are merely a preface.

Finally, reverting to our photographic version of *Sphinx*, we are tempted to point out one more of its symbiotic feature. The face and the neck are decorated with the digital operation, as if they are “haired” with numbers. The trapezoid beard adorns not the male but obviously the female face, not as the law of inheritance has laid it down. Stamped as it were with the seal of archetypal moulds, the androgynous creature of sphinx unites not only the above with the below, but also the gender opposites as well. This interpretation is by no means illegitimate, since the Ancient Greeks also imagined their sphinx in a female body, at least that is how it appeared in the classic tragedy before king Oedipus and asked its

riddles. What is a foreground for one culture might be a background for another, meaning that the woman-lioness form (with the additional wings) is also Egyptian derivation, namely goddess-lioness Sekhmet. Since the story of Oedipus is well known, there is no need in analyzing Oedipus' insufficiency to handle her revenge for his guessing of her riddles. In any way, we do not want to take the classic stance to a troublesome extreme of Freudian type and suggest a different approach to the matters.

It is not without a reason that our sphinx is depicted as an androgynous creature, symbolizing the unity of the opposites: between male and female, strength and gentleness, knowledge and love. Reverting to the neck and its Adam's apple, we are confronted with the "fact" that the fruit of paradise was given to Eve first, at least according to Genesis. The things stand as usually – *cherchez la femme* – and they will get you, one way or the other. The apple has a dual significance: it signals the uncovering of knowledge and at the same time it leads to a fall from the paradise, or from head to body, from top to feet. And turning art to the prophetic end of mythology, we might conclude that the "Adam's apple" belongs to Eve's neck.

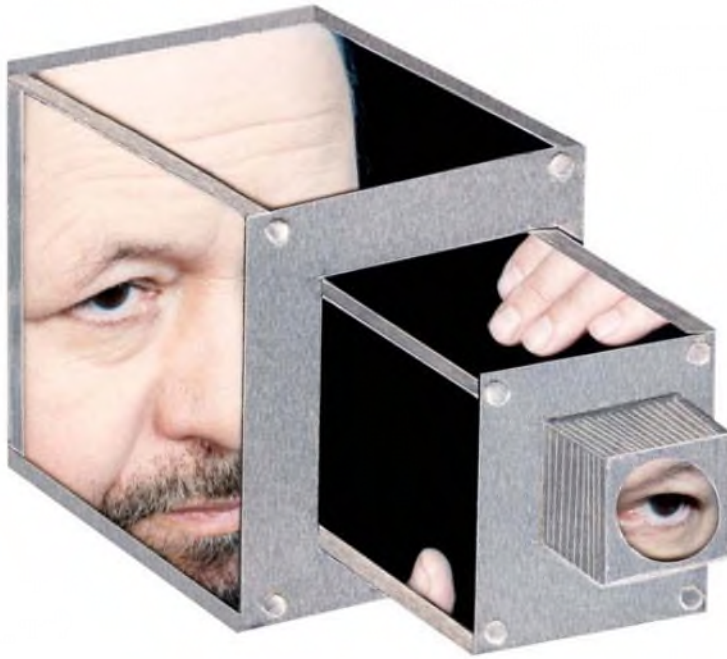
Every thing has its time, and that time must be watched. Similarly, archetypal symbols are born, not made. They descend to us the same way as myths, which are much too often ludicrously miscalled "fantasies." From symbols one can learn more than from words. But aren't all words symbols as well? Precisely in such context, we employed them in *Photoglyphs*. These glyphs are not mere records of dance movement of words and numbers, but rather a dramatic personification of the vision of different rational principles inherent in the universal order of forces. In their play, one can read certain similarity with human energies, which, before bursting into full-fledged action, remain in the subliminal zone, explainable mainly by symbols. Like we humans, those powers wear the faces, as if they are governing the physical life through their numinous codes. Is it possible to speak of God otherwise than in symbols? Accepted as merits or demerits, repressed or not, the evocative powers are far beyond an individual capacity. But if we speak of an absolute and eternal status, no allegory has it; they are not the end of the journey; they are only instruments. Moreover, the

value of symbols comes not from themselves but from the consciousness that uses it. At best, they remind us of what we already know but tend to forget.

Although the camera is a dubious instrument for visualizing esoteric concepts given its immense popularity, nevertheless, it was well suited to conveying our ideas. We saw how the initial physical content of a photograph, which simply reflects its surroundings, can be extended to a hyper-physical content and infused with multi-leveled symbolism. From antiquity comes the Ovidian maxim, "True art conceals the means by which it is achieved." In other words, art must appear artless; the goal is to express oneself in the common language of the people, but to think like a wise man. This language not only entered our work via the camera, it was also defined by our choice of a traditional subject: the face. However, the visual plasticity of art and its underlying

Echo © 1989





Cameraman © 2008, photo, metal

concepts enabled us to give voice to something more than that common language, magnifying the magical emanation of such realities that can hardly be expressed by words.

Perhaps, an exposition of our technical principal would also lit the story because one cannot discard all the commonplace means and practices, which are not less helpful in photography as ovens for backing bread. Here it is some of our photo recipes. For the series *Photoglyphs* we used Pentacon and Hasselblad medium-format cameras, 2 1/2 x 2 1/2-inch (6 x 6 cm), later switching to a Toyo, 4 x 5 inch- (10.2 x 12.7cm) view camera, which afforded us enhanced possibilities for multiple exposures and other photographic maneuvers in the next series *Perhappiness*. After making a drawing of the first exposure on the ground glass, we exposed the second image on the same negative with the maximum of precision, as in *Ego*, p. 57 or *True-False*, p. 203. The process required certain discipline and concentration not less demanding than in the art of archery. Consequently, the live “target” must not

make the slightest move for hours so as not to spoil multiple exposures of that literally *Still Performance*. In digital photography, one can create any image, any kind of dream-laden world, born from software manipulation and, as it often happens, such creations are overloaded with fantasies of dubious taste. Allured not by the technological operations, we were reliving our ideas through their faithful personification. Our thoughts took form passing through the tripartite mental-psycho-physical processing resulting in photographic imaginary as their extract. The Baroque music, most often cantatas of J.S.Bach, sounded in the background during the work. It helped us to set up our ideas on our faces like a lyric drama or sermons set to music. With its sonorous waves and measurement, music reflects the secret law of the world. In addition to the delights of the ear, for us, music was wonderfully helpful.

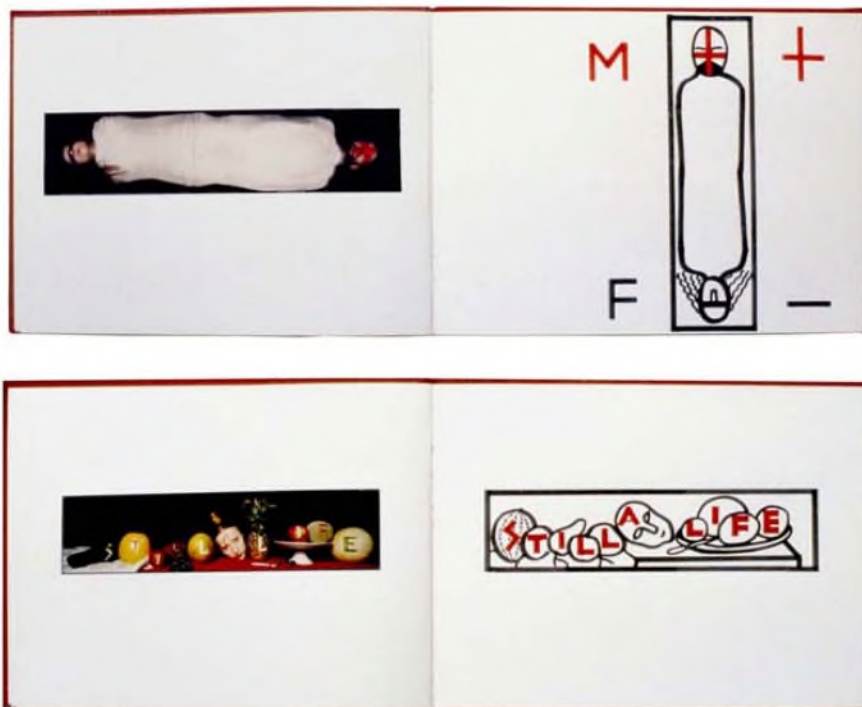
By shooting the image as close to the original concept as possible we were able to minimize the need for cropping, retouching, and manipulation during the printing process. The photographs were based on sketches, but at the same

Photoglyphs, installation views at Robert Brown Gallery, Washington, D.C., 1990



time, they were created on the spur of the moment. In fact, looking back, we understand that all our lifelong efforts in art in general and photography in particular were rather spontaneous and, to a certain degree, effortless. Printed with extreme sharpness of details without any computer alterations, the color photographs were displayed in artists' metal frames (48 x 48 or 36 x 36 inches) or sculptural metal constructions of different sizes. Many of the albums with preparatory drawings resemble collections of visual poetry. Selecting the most suitable of the drawings to shoot, we photographed two concepts per session, usually twice a week. Thus, the language was receiving physical shapes, silence, magical spells, defensive symbols, and other drawings "written" on the skin. Neither brush nor paint had everyday quality.

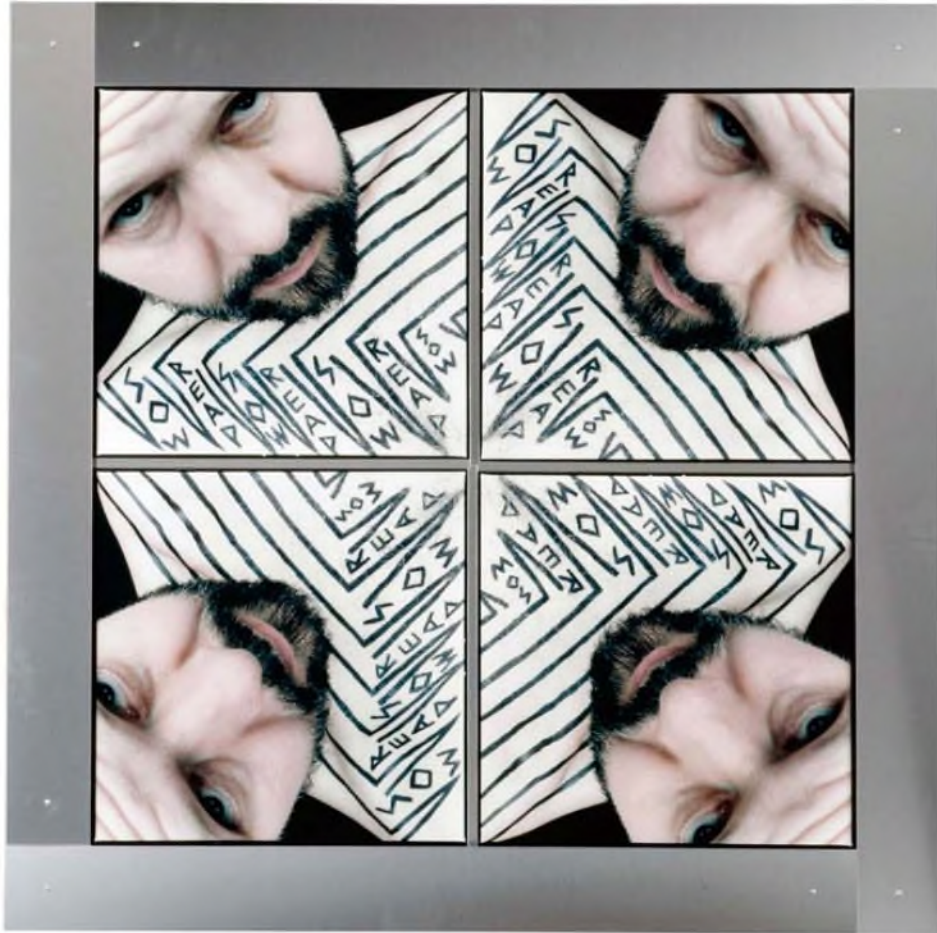
Photoglyphs were done with the easiness of a game, yet aroused from inner necessity and the heart. Thinking about their operating principle, it seems that not so much the aesthetics, wit, or irony that brought them all alive, but a somewhat trusting and spontaneous enthusiasm. Parenthetically, we are tempted to add here that the meaning of the word "enthusiasm" in Greek is more than inspiring, it is "god-inspired," that's what it means literally, "possessed by *theos*." Our creative process went far beyond the technique of the unconventional graffiti on the face – it was kind of an organic intensity that worked half-secretly behind the eventful images and brought inspiring flow from the inner source. Unintentionally, we attempted to mediate the ontological paradox depicting it in the questionable art of our hermeneutics. To come to the point, throughout the ages, supralogical prophetic perception was considered a mediator between the human nature and what is beyond it, between the ambiguously perilous manifestation of physical reality and a smiling transcendence in which it is rooted. The same key opens the mysterious sphere of art mythologically fit to state things that can never be spelled out in philosophical arguments. Similar to an alchemist thinking out his ideas experimentally, an artist uses visual technique in trying to cross the borderline between physical matter and the world of mind and spirit. The highest creative force – no matter how we call it: the logos, sanctifying grace, or divine substance – is an author, a witness, and a performer of an entire human drama,



Rimma Gerlovina, pages from the album with the drawings for photographs, 1988, hard cover, 9 x 12 x 2", 100 pp. Below, the same works at the exhibition *Two for Tango*, The International Center of Photography, New York, 1988



all its characters in all their external and internal psychedelia. And the most hard to gain self-realization also depends on the originator. In that light, the connecting link to the main spiritual source cannot be outweighed with an ingenious originality or an inborn gift.



Sow - Reap © 1991, C-prints in stainless steel construction, 48 x 48"

2: BOTH AND NEITHER

Nature seems to circulate everything with spontaneity within its immanent paradigm of life and death: while sowing, it is already reaping. That very process is depicted in the “quadraphonic” composition of *Sow-Reap*. Both language and geometric symmetry are used here ontologically, mapping out the program that is impossible to deviate from. Irresistibly, one slips into a realm of uncertainty through somewhat certain patterns. Yet, man’s innermost being is also free to follow its native bend in that mysterious shaping of destiny – his own and everybody else’s.

In the kaleidoscopic wheel, the square roots of the words “sow” and “reap” shoot their fractals into all directions. In a chain reaction, every square root is taken from another – just as, in the tree of life, each branch might alter the course of another. Touch that string, and a destiny instantly changes for better or worse. Behind that semi-algebraic image one can read the old saying: sow a thought, reap an action, sow an action, reap a habit, sow a habit, reap a character, sow a character, reap a destiny. In other words, what you give is what you receive. There is some kind of a limitless equilibrium. Expressing the dynamic effect of trajectories courses, that “square wheel spokes” evoke the linear structure of the *Golden Mean* formula.

$$\phi = \sqrt{1 + \sqrt{1 + \sqrt{1 + \dots}}}$$

The clockwise rotating “sow-reap” swastika (“well-being” in Sanskrit) encompasses the four cardinal directions. As a metaphorical expression for regeneration, the swastika is a sign of an unfolding world-idea, the creation proceeding from the mystical center. The network of man’s doing in the “sow-reap” wheel is expressed only in transitory conclusions because the finite cannot conceive the infinite. Our relative mind can describe the absolute only in relative terms: poetical, musical, mathematical, etc. Nevertheless, the true cause of a thing does not lie outside of a thing; it is in the thing itself, like a seed of a tree. If you sow a seed of an oak, you will not reap an ash tree, it can be only an oak.



Conspicuous © 1990

The visual plasticity of photography allows not only the encoding of archetypal ideas, but also the creation of an aura filled with the powerful emanation of human presence. *Sow-Reap* depicts the functions that the Hellenes attributed to the god Kronos or Father Time, the grim reaper that ruled their galactic graveyard. It made no difference to him whether it was a grave of cosmic proportions or a lot of an individual. His mill grinds young people old; and the balance of life and death is easily swayed. One thing is certain: even if everything is destroyed by time, time itself is still not destroyed.

In a similar manner, the photograph *To Be* sets this literally bare figure of speech upon a speculative background. Hamlet's dilemma is updated here to our time of relativity, while the added "footnotes" ("or both or neither") generate a koan-like ambiguity. Here the famed question receives a



To Be © 1989

novel flesh-and-bone outlook. When dramatized with the aesthetic means, not only it is brought to the border between mind and matter, but also into a conflict with the cold fact that the body is temporal and mortal. (At that point, we felt that some rhythm placed itself into the discourse, so we decided to let it go.)

In major cases, the choice between “to be” or “not” is not for man to make, considering the scope of accidents, disease, and aging.

While moving fast between the boiling and the freezing points, the prince appeals to his intense and thorny mind to solve unanswerable questions.

In vain. An intellectual decision is the outcome of logic and the work of brain.

One cogitates, therefore one is, save “our thoughts are ours,

their ends none of our own.”³

Consciousness is not the mind and is even further from the brain, so overloaded with restless guesses, endless facts of life, and fears.

Plagued with perplexities, Hamlet’s mind dwells morbidly upon revenge and casting fire upon the world.

With that one can “out-herod Herod.”⁴

Crude thoughts dictate crude deeds; power breeds on power; murder feeds on death.

The moment of revenge is brisk – to kill or not; that is the question.

To kill in mind, in thoughts, in deeds?

In a troubled state, a brooding mind is ever busied, ever worse than useless.

To kill yourself or to endure in case of failure?

There are so many ways to measure the imbalance of life and

Deed © 1989





Myself / My Slave © 1989

death, especially if your “dear soul is mistress of her choice.”⁵

A friend or foe to life, man can be both a master of his mind and its eternal slave.

That closely puts all questions into the braces of one’s own ego that likes to function on its own.

What’s next?

From time to time, the ego is disposed to think and to indulge itself in speculations on everything: existence, death, and consciousness – towards the unholy thought of its obliteration.

For in the struggle for its “righteous” place in life and afterward, the ego is tormented by misgivings prone to develop into Hamlet’s question.

Coming closer to his instinctive roots, his morbid thoughts and his “heroic” deeds show that his consciousness is judged

and processed by his ego, whereas it should be in reverse.
 The ego wants to live, but if it doesn't live according to its expectations, it wants to die while dragging others down.
 The ego likes to die on stage according to its own plot: under the limelight and with the fixed attention of the world.
 To cope with time and death with an intellectual taste, the ego sees the truth through its own funnel.
 Void of immortality, it simultaneously desires it and hates it.
 There is no promised peace in graveyard solitude.
 The body dies; its mighty reason dies along with it.
 That might be true, but in reality is Hamlet guilty of his notions?
 Aren't they aggravated by the depressive circumstances into which he is misplaced, unwillingly, against his better judgment?
 Who can resist submitting to the overload of sensory attack, oppressed by the hostility of life and existential truth?
 Then suffering this difficult existence might be less desirable than even non-existence without suffering.
 Hamlet is a prince; his bloody burden is neither one to shoulder nor to throw off.
 He acts according to his status, gripped by his own greatness, his superiority of intellect, and his position.
 The kingdom of the Danes belongs to him.
 The path of Hamlet is not the path of Christ or path of Buddha; neither does it belong to gatherings of gods and heroes of Ancient Greece and "the most high and palmy state of Rome."⁶
 Wise scholars like to blame him for his lack of action.
 The brutal world needs blood and needs it right away, while Hamlet cogitates.
 Sometimes that is the only method of relating to the forces of destruction marching on the heels of life
 ...unless the ego ceases to colonize the consciousness with complexes and shallow modes of thinking.
 ...unless some knowledge is imbedded a priori.
 If such abilities were granted to mankind, it would not need to feed its dull imagination on tragedies, Shakespeare is not excluded.
 Depending on the bond of consciousness and body, supremacy of one over the other, the famed dilemma splits into: to be or not to be in consciousness or in the body – that is the question.

While physical and metaphysical syndromes might contradict each other on a lower level of mutual misunderstanding, at the end all contradictions melt.

That brings us to the core, to the addendum “both or neither.”

If with his question Hamlet plucks a string that is invisible to others, the tallying of “both and neither” makes them disappear altogether: the string, the player, and the scene.

“The rest is silence.”⁷

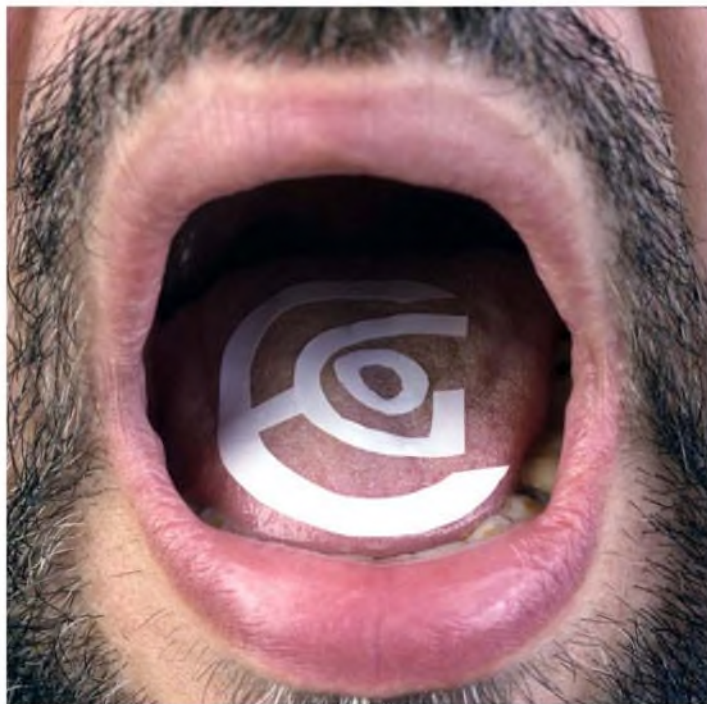
Life is shifted to nowhere; proceeding along splendidly, it abruptly dislocates itself to quantum nonlocality, per se.

What can one strike in that evasive “neither” – void even of oneself? And what is that that is not any that?

Of cause, it is an empty non-existent question for an edgy mind confined in restless life.

“Most like: it harrows me with fear, and wonder,” Horacio would add.”⁸

Ego © 1989





Two Crosses © 2000, photo, metal

Is that “both” and consequently “neither” reserved for ghosts, or gods, or neither?

Is death a portal to another life, as Romans thought: *mors janua* of everlasting *vitae*?

In our world of change, ruled by the alteration of rolling days and nights, of coming and departing, the infinite is challenged by the finite.

And our finite mind is helpless in its struggle to understand infinitely immeasurable values.

Why then does it exist?

The contrast of the infinite with our fleeting mind infuses it with “confidence” in its tormenting doubts, in its irrelevance, and shortness of its life.

The infinite is everything; from its perspective, “the Hamlet question” is beside the point.

For such enquiry neglects the very concept – according to its key the infinite absorbs all “kinds” of finitude.

Then, is the human mind prepared to grasp the sense of “both or neither” that is presented as a terrifying paradox?

What for?

Considering that man’s timetable is not much better than timetable of an ant, any nice beginning is short-lived and sealed by death.

We live on borrowed time; death waits for us from our birth.

Wrapped in fleeting nature and stuck in perishable body, are we able to recognize our immortality?

If so, there is no other road out of this world, save transcend-

Void ©1989/94, C-print in stainless steel
construction, pencil drawing, 48 x 41 3/4"



ing both its promising beginning and its inevitable end.
 That's why one has to leave the question of the corporeal life and death to nature, adapting to another mode of thinking.
 Because if we affirm "to be" it would give rise to one misunderstanding, while "not to be" would bring the other.
 The Phrygian injunction was austere: man is buried in his body as in his tomb.
 If so, the positive "to be" becomes its own crypt, the very affirmation of "non-being."
 Nevertheless, the higher order of the contemplation annuls the struggle.
 In search of "freedom-unto-death" one can be born into undying.
 The gods of the Orient left their immortal promise: "There is no birth no death to the real man."
 That brings us even closer to the thought of "both and neither" and its truthful paradox.
 The contraries must meet in their co-existence: in "both" they melt into each other, while "neither" brings another quantum leap; yet another mode of being.
 Let's contemplate it in the sequence: to be > or not > or both > or neither, since something always keeps all things from happening at once and linking them through time.
 First comes an affirmation. Hail! Man wants "to be!"
 So be it! Here He is.
 At first, he's happy.
 Then he thinks he's happy.
 Then, all his disappointments and grief cause him to hide within his morbid ego.
 Deadbeat, exhausted, drained, he does not want "to be"; now he wants to die.
 When our soul begins to grasp the light of darkening, the difference and the unity of the material birth and the material death, it's ready to dismiss them altogether and submit to the command of yet another law.
 That vital blending of "to be" and "not" creates spontaneous combustion, the chaos and the jump into unknown. The big bang!
 And the remnants of dense matter are blown up in our soul – so it releases its spiritual nuclear content, blessed with "immediacy" of knowledge, nonverbal and abstract, yet sure.
 Is this the secret of immortal Enoch, who "walked with God;



Step out © 1997

and he was not”?⁹ – referring to the biblical tradition that might or might not lend us wings.

Being “not,” he did not die; was he “translated” into heaven? Exempted from its course, the soul does not rely on a renewed hope for a better life, hope for another cycle, when one “to be” is followed by another, mixed with periods of unrest and whims of “not to be.”

Whose birth is blessed?

Him who needs not a rebirth, who does not have to take an earthly form with gravity and heaviness of burdens.

While being “both,” one finally becomes a “neither,” dissolv-

ing mortal bonds into the void?

The disappearance into what?

The marriage of the contrasts *ad absurdum* – is that a miracle within a paradox, arising from an internal course just as spontaneous, as natural and splendid?

If we accept that multiple dimensions are packed together in a single spot, in one locality, then “being” and “non-being” might likewise coexist.

In one reality, they might be separated, while in another intersected, even fused.

It’s possible that “being” here means “non-being” there and vice versa, or simultaneously “both” and simultaneously “neither.”

However it might be, they coexist.

All might proceed in simulcast, including both and neither coexisting somewhere, in a more evolved and distant universe.

Death is a part of life, as night and day are part and parcel of each day, each year, and each life.

Left to itself, death is only breeding in the captivity, in the material form of our limited dimension.

Here it is born, lives, and dies as everybody else.

If all is maya (these very words included), neither the ends, nor the beginnings have a real meaning, just spinning of the wheel.

This blooming world perceptible to our senses is already dead or, if you wish, it’s non-existent.

Then vice versa: perceived as dead, the world is fresh and blooming.

Each disappearance is followed by an appearance that overflows into another round of that engaging circulation.

Making us older and more thoughtful, it vigorously guards its secret that death and life cohabit in a single spot.

Our vision feeds on contrasts, play of light and shadow.

For man is blinded by the absolute eternal light.

Instead of blissful light, an unprepared eye sees awesome rigor, being blind and captive of its own fear before the absolute.

Locked into a struggle of opposites, it’s mixed and polarized, unable to discern the seed from its effect, right from wrong, reality from its appearance.

In all these play of opposites, what’s the opposite of struggle?

How to unlock it?

Such requires a lifting of the consciousness beyond it, beyond dualities and their grasping game.

It lasts until our latent feelings and attachments depart our captive mind, and we are left “alone” to know and to experience that cosmos is nothing but all soul.

(A little pause. Enough of rhythmic verses. Back to the analytic prose.)



Goblet © 1998

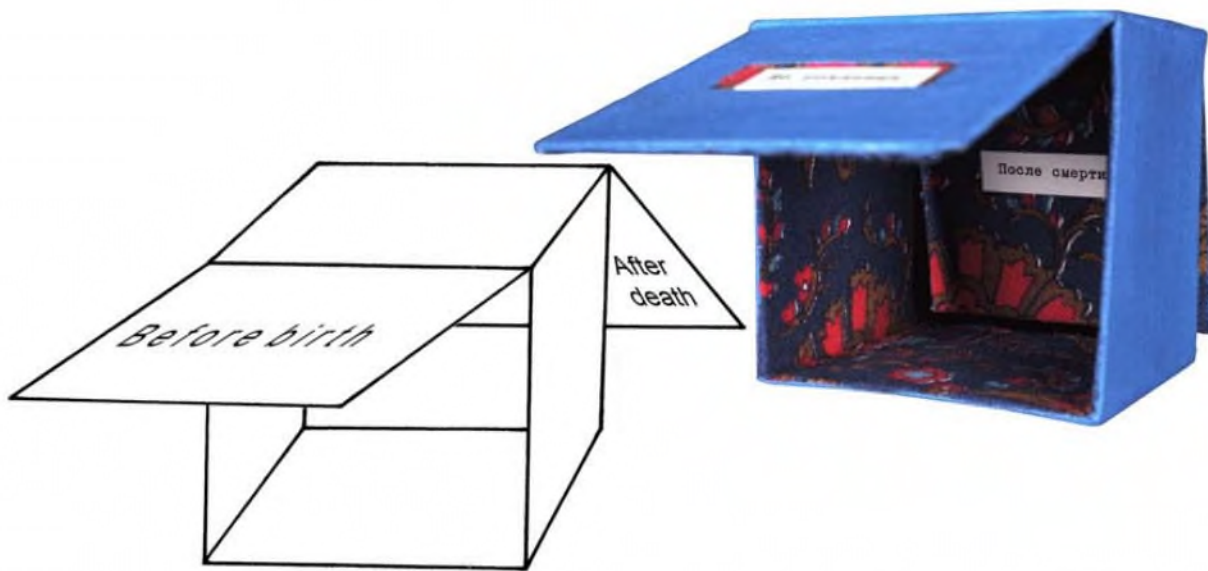
P.S. To avoid a needless argument, we suggest that the final stage of “neither” is veiled. It includes all previous experiences and converts them into something radically new, in which all qualities cease to exist.



Rimma Gerlovina, *Alive - Dead*: The work is shown in two positions, 1986, wood, acrylic, 40 x 8 x 3 3/4".

The theme of “survival” of your own death has been weaving through our art from the very beginning. Sometimes, art and poetry can deal with such realms, in which other disciplines are not capable to breath. In the “lethal” concept of the shifting object *Alive – Dead*, death is presented as another form of life, as a regression into the invisible. Does non-existence exist? The question is posed in a form of a shifting answer. In a stationary position, all concerned in this work, including you, them, and me, are alive, but if one shifts the panel, everyone is suddenly found dead. With the return of the panel into its regular position, everybody is resurrected. The old age maxim, “everyone born is destined to die” is counterbalanced here with its mirror image,

“everyone dead is destined to be born.” The blending of two states of life is similar to a merging of a plus and a minus into a zero point that suggests another level of comprehension. It can resolve into a big gap provoking a big leap, maybe even a big bang. In the cube titled *Before Death - After Birth*, the accent is made neither on birth nor on death, but on the intermediate state, posing a completely different question: where was I before I was? And where am I when I am not?



R. G., *Before Birth–After Death*: The cube can be opened from two sides; “Before birth” is written on the lid, “After death” appears on the bottom side, 1974, 3 1/4 x 3 1/4 x 3 1/4”.

Let us apply “before – after” configuration to the normal man who clings to what is normal, what is healthy and traditional, who not only desires but also has an ability to keep himself alive as long as possible. In maximum abbreviation that is depicted in Valeriy’s burial-like work *Life of a Man in Two Parts*, which deals with the problem of “to be” and “not

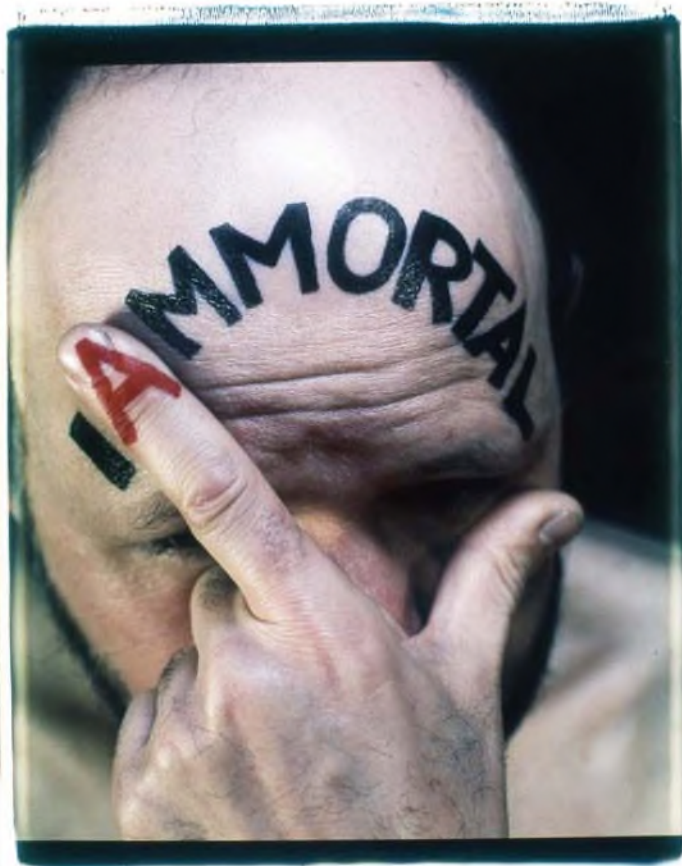
to be” with striking bareness. The relief is not so much a display of archaeological remains, as it is a kind of autopsy on the principle of existence in which life and death are but two halves of one life. Our bodies are formed out of matter, remaining the property of earth, which fertility they enjoy. Earth is our inhabitance; it is the substance of our planet, our source of nourishment, and our confinement. Children of heaven in theory but by the body of the earth in practice, we live with all following out derogatory meanings – which is bound to earth is not exalted in spirit. In that sense, mother-earth is not our mother but rather a nursemaid, a feeder, a mourner and a gravedigger *in vivo* and *in vitro*. Together with her milk and bread winning, we inherit her infirmities, her tendencies and desires, her dust, mud, and her darkness. In the crudest mass, earth manifests itself as gravity. Here we literally weight with matter. Therefore, the terrestrial element of the body always tends earthwards down, failing into matter, first pressed by the earth and later into the earth. The body fears dissolution, all its cells know that their organized unity is just a temporary formation.

V. G., *Life of a Man in Two Parts*,
1976, soil, toy mannequins, mason-
ite, glass, enamel, 18 x 34 1/2 x 4 1/4"



Pondering over the rate of mortality, one can arrive at a counterclaim: what, then, is the rate of immortality? And where to seek it: in the body, out of it, or both or neither? Who can jump out of one's own body safely, and if so, into what? One thing is certain – the answer lies beyond the trapping duality presented in binaries of matter and spirit, being and non-being, male and female, and the like. If so, perhaps we are immortal mortals as much as we are mortal immortals. If we superimpose these two modes of existence one onto the other, we can obtain an everlasting extract from their conjunction that we tried to encode in the photograph

Gerlovina, Berghash, Gerlovin,
I'mmortal ©1988, Polaroid,
24 x 20"



Immortal. That's precisely the instance when "to be or not" becomes the coexistence of "both or neither" in one locale, something and nothing. If led to the level of immediacy (as in certain Hesychast practices or yoga), the finite mind may glimpse the dissolution of all bonds into nothing. One more enigma might be added here concerning life and death. Unless the ego ceases to colonize the consciousness, man is dying through his own life. The question of immortality has sense only for those whose persona is already subordinated to that inner something that has ability for an access to immortality, otherwise to talk about it is like to measure the infinity with the help of a ruler.

Grape Sleeve © 2004



3: L-IF-E

At this point, there is no need in surveying unmapped territories, which might be conquered only by direct experience of mystic insight. The nature of living as we see it around exists in a state of flux and fusibility; and only a completely unconscious mind takes no account of time. Looking back to the different periods in our own creative flux, we see that in spite of the variety of genres, styles, and strategies, the general idea behind our art remained unwavering. Daily life, with its inadvertent deviations into extroverted and introverted periods, has not changed it either. Haven't we followed our chosen part without being aware of doing so? Something gives us grounds to think that our personal experience was underlying an otherwise impersonal process, which understanding might be a prerequisite of mental freedom from the pressure if not the tyranny of life. (Creative people are especially hinged on their alleged sovereignty both in art and in life.) In conjunction to certain events, at least as we see it, the scope of principal ideas in our art was syncretized through different genres, among which photoconcepts took a prominent place. Their pictorial plot is especially rich with the perennial metaphors, to take for illustration, a correlation of the cross and the grapes in the image *Vintage*, notable by its grapes of hair borrowed from the antique cults. Seen through the centuries of Christian signs and allegories, the grapevine symbol is not less vital now than it was before, it is still a path of communication in the contemporary symbolism.

Visual poetry inscribed on the face permits not only the distillation of metaphor, but also the intertwining of factual and poetic, physical and metaphysical. *Vintage* seems to be an example of such blending. By its very nature, life is not at peace; in a symbolic way, it rests on contradictions, our share of which increases once we begin to recognize them. Not for nothing do we have our vintage of pain and pleasure, which chase and cancel each other out. For that reason, this image of harvest bears the stem of a cross that casts a shadow of doubt on the fruitful adornments of the head. Grapes are our food, our wine, and they can be sour.

The word-sign is literally T-posted in the middle of the

symbolic garden of youth, alluring with its ever-captivating resilience and its murmuring promise of garden-fresh grapes. Confirming that ambiance, the word formation “vin age” (“vintage” without its overgrown “T”) echoes the pleasant cadence “win age.” Or so it seems. Without much eloquence



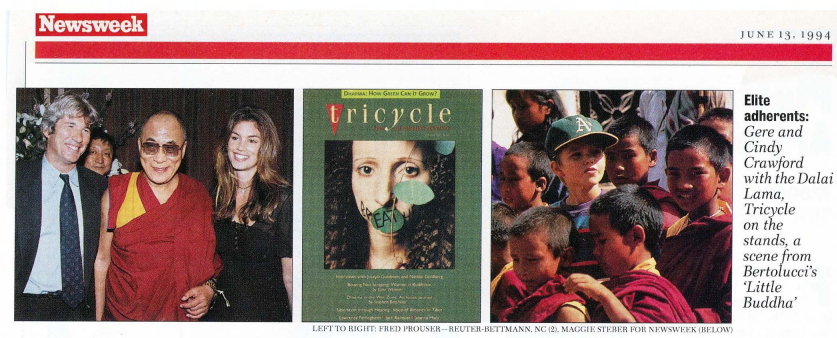
Vintage © 1990

the grand “T” crosses the fine scenery, signaling on the impermanence of nature that has radical surprises in store for everyone belonging to that bountiful and sadly imperfect world. Hence, the whole composition seemingly wraps around the cross, hinting at Dionysian mysteries through a well-developed symbolism of wine, uninhibited lifestyle, and above all the allegories of death and resurrection. Grapes of plenty are mixed with “the grapes of wrath.” The destiny of Caravaggio, whose painting inspired *Vintage*, seems to be of that very tint.

As any knowledge tends to be put into action, the meaning of this work is not confined to wordplay. The world doesn't only consist of ideas; it's also alive, like a vineyard in grape season, in which the harvest is periodically cast into the great wine press. Broadly speaking, life simultaneously consum-



Breathe © 1990. Below:
Newsweek, 6.15.1994



mates and consumes. The mental ability to grasp the nature of being is tested within the context of world events, which consequences are embossed on a human psyche. In spite of all our ideas, projections, and desires, there are circumstances that cannot be disregarded or forsaken, and this must ultimately be accepted.

As everything on our plane needs recurrent renovation, so do we. Together with the seasons and the surrounding nature, man is periodically animated almost like a newborn with the perpetual motion of the great breath of life. It is difficult to photograph breathing. Even if the poverty of the means might endow the result with greater subtlety or creative freshness, the technique never makes up for an idea – the “breath” of the image must not be exhausted by overly realistic details. Sometimes, the elasticity of symbolic language is a better choice, and following that line of thought we “manuscripted” a little memo on the leaf of the eucalyptus tree, the aromatic evergreen.

Many symbols organically emerge from the natural order and reflect that very order, which must not be understood in a straightforward manner. So we tried to say in the image *Breathe*, in which the act of breathing is frozen into a still performance, dissolving the boundary between the discrete movements of respiration. The nourishing syncretism of life stretches from simple breathing (the internal “eat”) to abstract vital principles through which all things are made and lowly nature is filled with activity. In the artistic cloth, it disguises the old symbol of the earlier numinous tradition, namely, the vivifying spirit of *pneuma*.

The ancient Greeks described breathing “according to its own law,” that is, without an air current, similarly to *prana* in Hinduism. By invoking the vivifying *pneuma*, they hoped to transform their bodily engine into a kind of *perpetuum mobile* of spirit, thereby shifting to mental breathing. The circulation of a life force or *prana* in breath and blood imitates the double aspect of creation in its general pattern: in its evolutionary way it is shown in the upwards movement of *prana* equated to inhalation; and the involuntary downward movement called *apana*, is followed by dissipation of energy and exhalation. Re-charging the energy of the organism, *samana*, also an aspect of *prana*, controls the digestion and heat regulation. Why do we go so far in a jungle of Indian

ascetic practices of breathing? Despite the Renaissance undertones of our *Breathe*, the fact that it appeared on the cover of the Buddhist review *Tricycle* suggests that its message is cross-cultural, at least in the respiratory sphere. The “even mindedly mindful” teaching of Buddhism also supports the same discipline of coordinated circulation of breath.

In attempt to maintain both, the flow of the metaphor and the flow of air, the image *Windy Scroll* presents a kind of visual narration spread over an unrolled scroll. What shall we read in it? A whiff of hair is breathing over the horizon; blowing lightly like the wind, it is set in motion by the imagining mind. It is possible that some concepts exist in our mind before we even think of them, but precisely by thinking of them, we bring them into existence. That is another form of breathing: breathing out ideas entailed by physically possible consequences. Let us trace that very concept within the stream of cultural events. There is, or should be, a rhythmic balance between breathing and the creative exchanging that coordinates cultural metabolism, a kind of biological photosynthesis in the arts. In other words, the best of creative people tend to absorb gross realism of the mundane life, while in exchange breathing out inspirational air. As plants consume carbon dioxide and release oxygen, so

Windy Scroll © 2008,
photo, metal





Balloon © 1996, photo, metal

they supply fresh air for society. To change the metaphor, they return the intuitive mystery of life to the hearts and minds of men, while presenting it in different types and forms of cultural artifacts. Thus, the great breath is perpetuated, absorbed, and assimilated into whatever stage of understanding is open to each of us.

There are several kinds of inspirations: having different causes, they produce different effects. The primary one, issuing from the immutable essence, exalts the soul and stirs genuine imagination as opposed to merely a fantasy. It produces the geniuses, which “are not individuals, but a collective soul,” in whom “the history of the culminating spirit objectifies itself in a single personality” (Albert Schweitzer about J.S.Bach¹⁰). Often separated from most people by destiny, by talent, and creative power that does not fall short of their aspiration, such individuals literally convert the

archetypal ideas and forms into comprehensible creative impulses. Immune to the popular streams in the cultural milieu, they never respond in a predictable manner and without conscious thought, keeping their freedom of choice and, consequently, the freedom of unemployment (sometimes for one's good, sometimes otherwise.) Both the heroes and the heavenly fools bring the existential world into harmony in their inspired and inspiring message – and do so with the minimum input of their own personal limitations into what they transmit on the objective level. Genius is principally a biological phenomenon, not a development of a talent.

The second type of creativity is of sentient impulses born of passion or even inner disorder. Charged with magnetism, that kind of artistry provokes unordinary creative states, yet often, but not always lacking the yearning for harmony and beauty that lies hidden in every soul. It seems a the similar thought transpires in the testimony of Heinrich von Kleist:

Opening © 1991, photo, metal



“Hell gave me my half-talents. Heaven grants a man a complete talent or none.”¹¹ When successful, the self-indulgent imagination is very impressive with its grandeur, inventiveness, and pathos, to which its numerous connoisseurs find genuine psychic attunement. The pivotal image of that kind



At Louvre © 2004

of talent is Salvatore Dali. In the psychoanalytic scenario, however, all creativity based on instinct leads only back to instinct, to somewhat animalizing reasoning, passions, and desires. Surprisingly, even a very polished intellect might be overly imbibed with this type of reasoning; and one such serves mainly as a tool for the acquisition of fame, power, riches, and even various perversions of mind. Such a person,

who is usually his own favorite artist and honestly admits it, finds excellent employment for his extraordinary fancy and his narcissistic freakiness in the collective process called cultural progress.

There is yet another kind of art feeding on the conceptual,



Ego © 2002

social, or aesthetic simulation of reality, which the vulgar call inspiration; while in reality it is merely excited by the love of glory and has a hue of the current customs and times. Such artwork characteristic of a certain short period is regarded with awe and always overvalued by the populace. The main thing is to remain common and accessibly pop in both the message and its expression. Common sense or common

nonsense is unquestionable on the side of the superfluous art, which is, in fact, doomed to mediocrity. That ardor for creativity also can utilize one's talent to a certain degree, but it is far from the equal of the living plasticity of the genuine gift. Besides, the aims and interests of the quick rising and falling stars of creative art are often not of a sort that elevates humanity.

Continuing the survey of creativity of different intensities, we may skip the transitional nuances suggesting that the lowest degree of inspiration might be roughly called skilled work. Are not, by far, the great number of artisans (and some artists) who exercising their creativity for the sake of entertainment and mainly commercial purpose? Some are living for art, while others live by art. For that matter, cinematographic and theatrical arts are even more prone to artsy banalities and a degraded set of values. There is a bad breath in any culture, lulling unaware spectators into the slumber of superficial entertainment or exciting them with all kinds of sceneries stimulating sexual pleasures, disgusts, or horrors – the opulent menu is for all tastes: stretched from philistine commonplaces to all kinds of freakiness, down to the rich well-decorated hell. It is always a matter of difficulty for the rigidly objective mind to differentiate the creative efforts and see the difference between genuine art and its crafty doppelganger; between the spontaneous, somewhat magical ability and the energetic flashy type of talent that fades before long. Besides, there are many outlets for an interpretation. The congregation of elegant, sophisticated persons usually prefer a novel outlook of whatever it is, art including – they are into a trendy style soon to be changed. In the meantime, the crowd always praises the emblematic secondary stuff, which is habitually revised by the next generation.

Eventually, every unordinary person would learn from his experience that the world predominantly esteems the standard values. In everything, people like that what tends to reflect their own consciousness; below its level, everything will be of no interest, wholly above it, the message will be yet invisible and distant if not altogether irritating. Hence, everything on the margin is nearly surviving while the middle section ascribed to golden mediocrity is getting the best care. Success, therefore, is not a measure of lasting value, as much as a bestseller is not a measure of classic literature. We can

rephrase it by saying that what is called realistic is not necessary real or what is known as art for art's sake is not necessary fine art, even if it bears the seal of its likeness. Heaven alone knows, but the fact remains the same – it is not enough to look like art for it to be art. This calls to mind all the difficulties it imposes, of which would be enough to sketch only their consequences. It is not set in stone, but it happens quite often that the genuine message of the artist of an inherent capacity becomes appreciated with much slower speed than the life of the artist itself, as Bach's life, par excellence, and many others for that matter. What is highly elevated and

Reading Light © 2002



superior is most difficult to see. Arthur Schopenhauer, himself of that breed, justifiably observed: "The exceptional man is like an archer who can strike a target other cannot, the genius is the one who can strike a target other cannot even see."¹²

Resuming the thread of thoughts on the creative metabolism, we could well add that it has not only recurring psychoactive patterns, but rests on somewhat a symmetrical proportion similar to the process of breathing. Even in the most fertile imagination, there is always a rhythm, with which one creates. It may sound wonderfully simple, like catching the musical rhythm and breathing it out. The creative rhythm harmonizes conjunctions of many things, even those that rarely come together, then, of course, one has to face the music. Accordingly, that might entail a sardonic question: how many artists have Van Gogh's ear for music? And what have you to say for yourself? It would be rather presumptuous of an artist (and indeed of everybody) to claim one's visions genuine, though some fanatically do it without even having the latter. Consequently, that leaves us on the horn of a dilemma, as it is rather difficult to decide whether to risk offending people accusing them in dreaming up their talent, or agree to something we disapprove of. Don't shoot the pianist, as the expression goes, he is doing his best.

As abstract ideas are occasionally explained and paraphrased by the aid of pictures, so our concepts also "try" to find their visual muse. The feminine image *L-if-e* is ambiguous enough to present one more riddle concerning creative metabolism: does it dispel illusion like a yogi, or does it create reality like a fakir? Life is a continuous process of creating, so is our personal life, and art is only a superstructure for that basis. In an endless process of making the molds that cut all other forms, we keep on creating our own destiny as if by the chicken-egg paradigm that continues to work beyond our control by creating itself, once the process is set in motion. Both the symmetrical composition and the magic web of hair are congenial to the idea of egg for egg's sake. In a slightly unconventional way of expression, the image shows energetic ebbs and tides; they are in the balance of the twin eggs nested in the hair as well as in the alloy of the visual rhythm and the lingual pattern of the calligraphic "cuneiform," old as the world. What interests us more is not

the “re-face-ing” of the deep-rooted rhythm of life, but what and to whom it serves. The aim of human *l-if-e* is not only and not so much in its physical aspect as it is in that spiritual reality that we call the human soul.

The soul is said to be “the organ of nourishment,” yet full



L-if-e © 1990

of iffy-ness, with many and grievous pains with a latent ending in every beginning. Preoccupied with probabilities, the soul is a *dynamis* of potential, the whirl of possibilities, the prolific, generative source, which can be equally psychic and psychotic, holistic and disruptive, intellective or animalistic. It periodically loses its breath and energies amid cross-purposes and conflicts; and yet, it is life itself – “if” one is willing to admit it. However attractive life may appear to men, it fails to lack that latent pressure signaled by the ambiguous internal “if.” Without overbearing textual infor-



If © 2002

mation, as if it were a cursor, the uncertain “if” implies that something specious frequently opposes the general flow of events, jammed by their contrasting confusions.

Life, powerful and prolific, can bend everything to its ends; that is what we try to stage in that image. Moving aside its hair curtains, we show the eggs, two of a kind that conspicuously enter the picture as two emerging actors being put on trial for ingénue. Perhaps, the first assumption would be in propensity to some biological process – a touch of coexistence with nature, life in its incipience, or some other bio-secret that we would try to guess. Using our minds, we analyze our own biological functions and the life forces that operate them. In that light, the eggs are shown as the seeds



Vita © 2002

that simultaneously represent the end of one crop and the beginning of another as a built-in, sustaining principle of nature. Separated by “if,” they seem to contain provisional meaning with certain reservations: if only man could know the answer to the 1-if-e-posing questions. “Much virtue in if”¹³ is a psychoanalytic insignia of doubt. *As You Like It* or not.

We do not want to harden that saying into a category of statement, fully admitting however that the unprofitable iffy thoughts might not leave one even while one sleeps. Doubt is a deficient state of mind, into which everybody falls occasionally when perplexed by the unfavorable tidings of life. For protection, some individuals prefer to wear a genetic mask of skepticism all the time. Not only reason, but also

ignorance and its close companion, a blind belief, harbor plenty of suspicions just about everything. In an overwhelming proportion, uncertainty might produce a turbulent anxiety; and no reason would be a help.

One of the most vivid examples of lingering in the malcontent of doubting is presented in the ancient text of *Yoga Vasistha*,¹⁴ The man who possessed the almost impossible combination of wealth and wisdom was engaged in austerities with the desire of acquiring the celestial jewel, the philosopher stone, in European terms. His effort was intense. So within a very short period of time, the jewel appeared before him. Unable to reach any certainty concerning it, he was perplexed, musing endlessly: "Is this the jewel? Or is it not? Perhaps it will disappear if I touch it? The scriptures say that it can only be obtained after a whole lifetime of striving. I am merely hallucinating..." Thus confused in his mind, he did not make an effort to take the jewel. And the jewel, thus ignored, disappeared.

No doubt, it is easy to stick to the habit of doubting. Similarly to any other habitual reaction supported by the subconscious, it does not wear out or fall away readily. What if a delight and a consolation of nature is only a cheat, not a progress? It only keeps us running in circles as squirrels on the wheel without a possibility for advancement and perfection. On the other hand, what if a gratifying and a fruitful vision of nature is a sign of a universal equilibrium that reflects the right order? To which side is the beam tilted? Perhaps, to both, if we may suggest that disillusionment comes only if one has illusions. By analogy, it would be tempting to deduce that a disappointment likewise is a by-product of an appointment. One can play with the allusive syllogisms continually, but that sort of logistics would be a wearying occupation and utterly useless if one is to pacify the havoc of doubts, which can poison both the scrupulously managed feelings and the ferociously concentrated thoughts. The reason-principle in its overanalyzing capacity always carries the uncertainty, to say the least. The methods of questioning, especially the Cartesian sets of arguments, are never adequate to solve the problem behind these two letters of "if." In a sophisticated way, the logical means of cognition seem to work with mathematical certainty – while leading to uncertain possibilities.

Then what? Locked in the castle of doubting one might try to escape it with the key called “hope” (incidentally, the only one “hopeful” item in Pandora’s box) or make use of an even more fitting instrument of “faith,” through the eye of which everybody sees life differently. Whatever the interpolated meaning of “if” has in store for us – on the subjective, the objective side, or both of them – it is ever standing on the way of any prognosis, benign or otherwise, but mostly the former. To that we are tempted to add, *exempli gratia*, that men are mostly faithful until temptations pass. By taking different pleasant or unpleasant forms, they seed the doubts in

Scales © 2004



our minds that consequently we reap in the events of our life, while sowing yet another crop of doubts.

Is it possible to judge without deceiving others and yourself? Do we search for words in vain, merely extending our minds into the void of iffyness? Not once, we had that strange feeling that every written word narrows down understanding (here speak the visual artists!) Nevertheless, the failure of one or many verbal enterprises do not necessarily reduce them to nothingness. In other words, even the iffy misgivings, inclined to contradict, might serve the purpose, bringing the unhappy contrast to the right end. Its significance might be conveyed by the old formula – the wise are not dependent on the means of cognition. Their emotions stand not against the reason, but most importantly, their mind operates in a different way, which would be fair, if perhaps imprecise, to describe as searching for truth by intellect-transcending meditation. If (and only if) the self-identification of the soul is granted, it stops wandering in incoherent frequencies of nature and gets an opportunity for glimpses of its own all-pervading substance. According to the legend, when Indian sage Shankara was approached with the question “who is imprisoned in ignorance?” he replied: “He who asks,” meaning only the doubter is troubled by this question. All questions disappear when the questioning ego is stilled. At this point, we had better move out of the probability fog of doubts, leaving the unsafe province of “if” behind.

Aside of the iffiness, the soul has many aspects, numerous as the stars in the sky; she is the idea of ideas. It seems that this persistent search for her identification is also an impulse devised in the character of man by I-if-e itself. Some people approach these questions with the simplicity of ABC blocks, while others prefer to see them squared, as $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. Find a triangle and two-thirds of the problem is solved – as if that Pythagorean saying is literally eyeing through the image depicting the renowned theorem on the male face. As always, the composition is resolved through geometrical balance forming somewhat beneficial alliance with the message. Talking about symmetrical arrangements and proportions in general, they tend to allude to harmony not only in a conceptual sense, and not only in the province of artistic imagination but replicate the fractal wonders of the world.

Where does this assumption come from and what are its



$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ © 1989

reasons? The aspects of physical nature, the individual and universal, have been numerically and, perhaps, fractally elaborated in the Pythagorean theory of the harmony of the spheres, in the theory that reflects the higher levels of reality. For the adherents of those ideas, the Divine language finds its best expression through perfect geometrical proportions, balance, and beauty. Perhaps rather subconsciously, we inherited some of these geometrical precepts long before we came close to those theories. But what is particularly relevant here is the implication that their meaning has both spiritual and mythological overtones. In its essence, that teaching was not confined to abstract properties alone, intending to influence the whole being through certain rules of living and mild ascetic practices. Avoiding the unworthy and the inessential, the Pythagorean rites were pregnant with the lofty goals and noble purposes and supposed to act not only directly upon the

aspirants' life, but also on the transitory world of forms, which in common language is called reality. Aside from the discipline of secrecy, the utmost sincerity was one of the prerequisites for practicing these theories. Transgressing the gross limits of nature, one must remain inherently natural. What is implicit in that idea is that nothing significant can be bred from education and imitation, from rites and religious practices, unless it ripens itself in a proper time or, rather, the consciousness is ripe to integrate them. That rule is no less important now than it was centuries ago. Then, the error of striving (and iffyness) is put aside and the theorem or whatever implied by it might be solved.

The triangle harboring the answer to the Pythagorean enigma concerns not only the geometrical rules, but also vision, which is an active link between the brain and the mind. The eyes are said to be the doors to the soul, perhaps, the revolving blinking doors. Looking behind them, either forwards or backwards, at first one would meet not the essential, symbolically designated by the soul, but a persona attached to it, perhaps many of them (their concept is so fluid that each personality could very well feel a part of someone else.) With its inner eyes blinded, the personality controls only external vision unless the capacity for seeing differently is activated and stimulates the drastic changes in the character, making it skilled by habitual practice in the discernment of right and wrong. Then moved by a sound mind and a honest heart, one might find that what has been previously seen through a rising mist of personality turns out to be of a very different nature, if not in direct opposition to our former good and bad, proportionally poling apart. In any way, seeing precedes understanding.

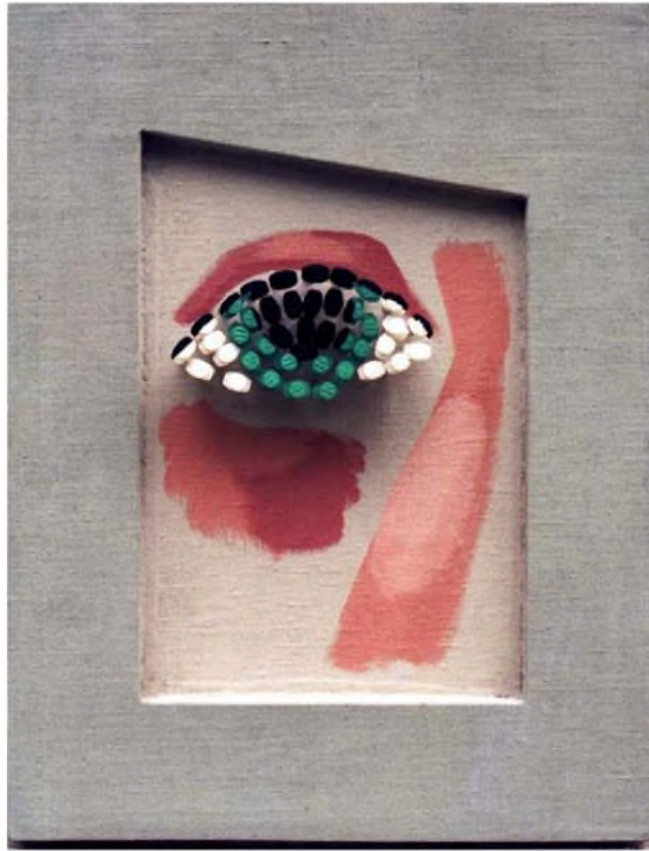
Put between the eyes, the conundrum *Eye Sees Eye* follows their symmetric unity in such a way that the words seem to slide back and forth, while folding themselves into a formula. Like derives origin from like, word for word, eyeball to eyeball... To make things a little more provocative, the verbal twins are written in reverse, reflecting each other like in a mirror. It makes sense, since not only vision, but life in general is prone to sharp reverses. Yes, but there is more to it: taking truth by the wrong way, one might present it in an inverted vision, inverted by self-sufficient foolishness or in a clever way; the worse scenario is when it is done with a vivid

intelligence and misuse of the dialectic skill. There are many other aspects of the dualistic vision, with symmetrical or asymmetrical splitting into two, with or without an optical illusion of the mind. As suits most art, it would be easier to comprehend it from any but the mythological angle, showing how something can be two things at once and how that would not contradict our seeing. In that sense, our eye-to-eye equation is a mixed metaphor of contrasting vision, including not only what is visible, but also what is achieved through a magic web of imagination. With his reason-eye, man looks after the common ways of the world; with his inverted eye, he dreams and receives vision and revelations. Under the circumstances, it would be advantageous to keep our foot in each world. That is another question how we interpret what we see here and there.

The intensity located in the eyes is all the more remarkable

Eye Sees Eye © 1989





V.G., *The Eye*, 1984, mosaics from syringes, canvas, homasote, acrylic, 20 x 17 x 3 1/2"

when they are emphasized, or even singled. That theme was very much exploited visually in Valeriy's relief-paintings and sculptural heads, in which the eyes are laid as mosaics from the hypodermic needles filled with oil paint. Akin to close-up photography, the painted faces are framed and frozen in their odd memorable moments. Their syringe eyes seem to follow the spectator with their strange magnetic, somewhat vigilant gaze, while the sticking-out mosaics dramatically increase its intensity. Always the integral part of the work, the eyes, severe and sorrowful, are shown as a defensive symbol, not so much as the eyes of flesh that disclose the physical and

sensory, but rather as an image with hidden potential for an alternative vision. Such is the relief-painting *The Eye*, which is altogether an eye. It hints on the outstanding capacity of vision, when all the cells of the body “see” their way and become one eye. In the annals of psychiatry, there are cases when the survivors of a near-death experience reported that they could see 360 degree around themselves and, at the same time, and to their surprise, found themselves looking at their own backs. It sounds like a panoramic photography if, *per impossibile*, we revert that account to our visible world. Heaven alone knows whether one is dreaming the picture through a deadly sleep with or without one’s optic nerve involvement and what in us could transmit messages in such a circular way. One thing that is truly valid is that whatever happens inside of people has the same weight as the things that happen outside of them; and even improbable illusion is valued as emotionally real.

In the photographic art, the eyes play even more of a prominent role than in paintings or objects, in which they are fashioned by the artist to their shape out of a piece of rude matter. Reproduced on the photographs with greater *human* sharpness, they are alive and conscious – they are not like eyes, they are the eyes. Prompted by our metaphorical predisposition, we have to admit that our subject of interest is not the eyes of flesh, but rather the idea of integral vision, even if it cannot be directly demonstrated or at any rate felt. We perceive it as an “invisible” ability to see and receive the unbroken flow of knowledge, which is more than helpful in the gradual reweaving of our modern souls with the soul of humanity itself. That magical flow and its control might become steady by habit. By far, not all art is fit to continue the line of spiritual syncretism because it is seen differently by people with different ways of seeing. Occasionally that quality was attributed to artworks of the gracious antiquity and to the religious art, mostly the icons that do not conceive of the promised beatitude in carnal terms. Defending the infallibility of the old ideas, we are not praising the ancient at the expense of the modern, since all traditions are vitally related to one another and at all time equally present in one form or another, therefore the contemporary art also has its clue to a metaphysical truth. For the most part, it is an illusive clue, yet the genuine effort also can stimulate good thoughts

that might be clear and immediate like visual perceptions.

It is worth pausing for a moment to consider the effect of all that is said upon our daily art. What we came to realize in the process of our own “photosynthesis” is that almost all of our ideas, their photographic expressions, and perhaps, even the whole process can be described as partly natural and partly supernatural. Behind all these was some kind of naked force that paradoxically, as it might sound, came in an unforced and easy way. With that, we were becoming more and more witnesses of what is going on inside of us; and this observation demanded less outgoing involvement and more awareness.



Single Eye © 1996, the open eye is drawn on the closed lid.

4: MODULE

Although we photograph faces, the resulting works aren't portraits – we use not models, but modules, similar to those introduced in our early album *Semantics of Possible Worlds*, 1977, to which therefore we have to revert in order to explain the idea of a module. Made as if it was a visual scenario for a sci-fi documentary movie, the album contains somewhat acrobatic images accompanied with short comments that bring into question our so-called “reality.” To give some examples:

“The module exists simultaneously in the present, past, and future.”

“The module is everything and eternal. The module is every thing and everything is a module.”

“The module exists only in its own consciousness.”

“The module may personify some other module that had died in the nearest possible world.”

“The module modulates itself,” and so on.

There is no intention here to overrate any freedom or eccentricity; on the contrary, by assembling the pictures into a significant whole, we try to form a coherent concept that holds together this rather futuristic work. In addition to its strange faith into a weird and wonderful future, the work preserves a certain loyalty toward the past. If man is born “in the image and likeness...” then by his or her holographic fraction it is possible to envision the whole. Similarly, through the past one can envision the *future*, and through the now, one can envision the whole time loop fastening our dimension. It might be observed in passing that the true yogi can transfer his consciousness into the consciousness of another by virtue of the fact that all is one, united by one *akashic* substance of all. If a higher light-wave transmission of the space-time continuum is superimposed onto an individual, and its magic working upon him is fully sensible and effective, he might be able to experience the distant in the immediate reality. That is to say, distant time and space appear to be near. In some way, that apprehension can be expressed via theoretical concepts, exploratory images, and, we might well add, various flights of the imagination.

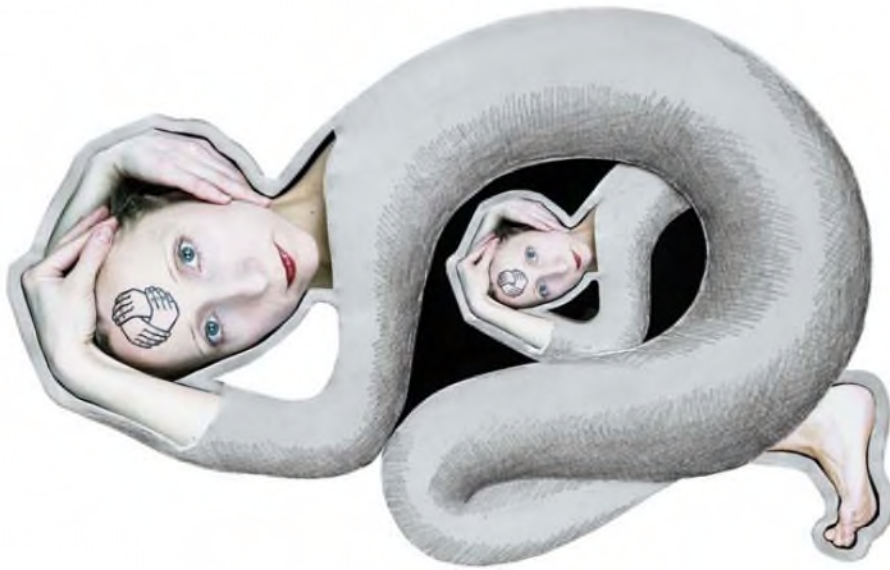


Three images from the album *Semantic of Possible Worlds*, 1977, photos: Vladislav Danilov. The comments from top to bottom: "One and the same module may form a common area of two different worlds." "The name or description of the module is substituted for itself." "An essential feature of this possible world is in the fact that first modules die, and then are reborn."

Metaphorically, the module personifies different states of psychological and visionary experience. Despite its multiple guises, it exists in a unitary image. In *Photoglyphs*, its physical presence is usually reduced to the face, not in an emotion-laden style of portrait, but still live and lively. The images are not framed within static photography, but belong to a performance ethos, meaning that all our photo-concepts are in reality still performances infused with dynamic pros and cons expressing diverse values of psychogenic, mental, and spiritual experiences. All works are done under the spell of the archetype that pushes all men along the path and attracts them to their source. The minds and senses of those who recognize it are not indifferent to the effects of harmony, beauty, and the different perfecting qualities that are alien to the incorporated aesthetics of commercialism continuously lapsing into a mechanical kind of routine. Inclined toward time-honored and mystically tinted mythological semantics, and with respect to its aesthetic modulus, we try to transgress the gross material order of things in our art. In a way, the photographic images follow the steps of the modulus from *Semantics of Possible Worlds*, when it steps out of its perceptible setting, as if receiving a greeting from another world. We fully admit that if our images never lapse into emotional outbursts, their “feet” sometimes happen to leave the ground. In general, our approach is not so much concerned with fine art as it is with sincerity and spontaneity, which are essential if one is to maintain a certain transmitting ability. It is not a case of playing one’s own tune, but superimposing the objective over the subjective and “channeling” certain immutable principles of existence into their particular mutable expressions.

Meta-phor and meta-physics are related through their meta- principles and deal with certain fundamental substances that reach far beyond the storehouse of facts. On each plane of explanation, the names might be different, but the essence is the same. To give the most drastic example, *ex hypothesi* – God is another name of the Absolute. In other words, the Superior Oneness objectifies itself and becomes the many; and any creature in this world is one of these many – a mini-module projected from a maxi-scale. If the cause of the creation is equally immanent and transcendent, we humans are too, but our capacity to understand what it means

is dormant. Man tends to forget that he is essentially a spiritual being having the germ of the Godhead within him, the germ that can grow into a consummate life form beyond ordinary human ability. If the Creating Source is an active witness of each consciousness, which is part of it; then being a part of it through our consciousness, we also represent the universal whole, though each in our own rudimentary way. At best, human beings reflect not only that uniqueness and multiplicity, but also the spirit, which is ingeniously wrapped by the material veil.



Perpetuum © 1995,
photo, metal, pencil

Perhaps art is one of the regal instruments that can serve both the veiling and the unveiling of the spirit (the rest can wait). By turning art to a higher end, it might be readily agreed with only a proviso that one is always in danger of mistaking aesthetic idealism for spiritual values. If one is to cross the line of visible and invisible, they had better unlearn all previous lessons of naturalism, practicality, gross sentiments, and dreamy imagination, and let the illusions of ignorance enwrapping the Disneyland-ish culture pass and be forgotten. Many people are safely protected from their cogni-

tive insight by natural means and their own lack of receptivity because coming face-to-face with the mystical and the irrational can evoke not only sense of exalted beauty and enrapture, but also create a dissonance in life, disrupting everyday reality. Therefore, symbols and signs of the sublime order are not only visually instructive, but are also safe. They pertain, if we may say so, to the science of aesthetics, when one sees through the eye and understands through the heart (our “secondary” thought process).

In that light, the role of the *module* is not narrowed to the aesthetic simulation of reality; it is rather a pictogram or an icon that stands for its target by the same virtue of an analogy to it. There is, or at least has to be, some kind of concord between the micro-world of each atom in man and the macro-world of the universe (as articulated by the Hermetic dictum “As above, so below,” among others).

Serpent © 1989



According to this view, one may express the universal through the human presence, reflecting “the face” of the world in man's face and dimensions – an embodiment of the principle that we exist in all that exists. Therefore, instead of photographing all that exists, we photographed its representations, using ourselves as modules.

Precisely in such context, *Greek Formula* depicts a cruciform monogram composed of the two Greek words meaning “light” (*phos* > photos) and “life” (*zoe* > zoo). The image signifies the descent of the creative impulse of light into life-forming matter. Empirically, light is unmanifest until it passes through something; matter is that something, which is conducive to its manifestation. When endless creative potential descends into the relative, hence transitory, phenomenal world, it supplies this world with a vital impulse.

Upon entering life, light becomes the world.

The homogenous primordial forces of light and life (and their counterparts, spirit and matter) cross and recross each other. Uniting, they influence each other, but remain two in a perpetual balance. The antique crossword used in the *Greek Formula* points toward their mystical center on which creation rests. The essential ordinance of its outflow is imposed on us as a supreme law that does not depend on our opinion or the immediate range of facts that dominate human understanding. In spite of its archaic lineage, the Greek Formula is not only a sublime idea or a pure abstraction; it is a living symbol not less accurate now than it was before. According to the Gnostic concept, The Word of God expresses itself primarily through the sensible existence – light penetrates life, here and now. The idea supplies a variety of forms, but only becomes accomplished when it is embodied.

Artists often touch some unpredictable dimensions, which we do not pretend to know, but somehow their significance is related to our personal life-experience and the factual world. The signs and signatures of the cultural past and present might serve as paradigmatic tools for its understanding. So it is in that case. Masterfully articulated into the literal formula, that old Greek cross-symbol can be applied on all levels: above, below, and beyond, within all things, big and small, and, of course, on the level of humans. It has its center of gravity in each moment and everywhere. Following

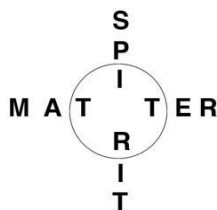


Greek Formula reads vertically
"light" (*phos* > *photos*), horizon-
tally "life" (*zoe* > *zoo*) © 1990

the steps of the art of hermeneutics – conceptual in our case – we laid out the basic model depicting the descent of the intelligence of light into the molding substance of life. Each order of that model is shown in dynamic association with the two juxtaposed principles of the *Greek Formula*, replicating it in each descending degree.



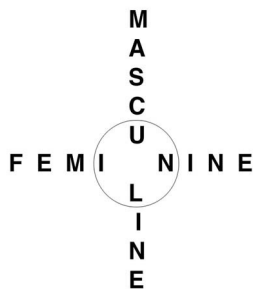
In the infinite-finite correlation, the concept of time manifests in mere movement without anything that moves. Yet, something is already “in” within the “INI-tial” circle.



The quaternary arrangement of spirit-matter has to be treated from the standpoint of its “TRI-une” center. The enigma of a ternary within the quaternary was in almost universal use. Light and life are in constant flux; their equilibrium is changing on each subsequent stage. Light enters the mode of darkness in matter – the above descends into the below, joining the grandiose with the trivial. That cannot be devoid of engrossing consequences. Life is feeding on light, so to say, eating it away; and yet light continues to exist and circulate downwards and upwards, being trapped by matter only temporarily. Subjected to the darkness of the formative nature, light supplies life with natural vitality but remains supernatural.

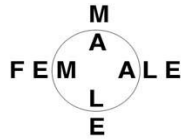


In that raying formula, the vertical light is surrounded by the life. The central “G” is a polyvalent sign that might stand for God or contrariwise remind us of gravity causing the acceleration of freefall; it all depends on which point one looks at it and with what purpose.

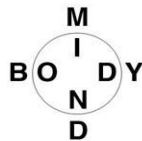


In a bipolar reproductive order, the gender rules the process. None can reach the Father save through the Mother. The circle is “impregnated” by the lunar or, in the weirdest

scenario, loony magnetism, under which influence life is given, preserved, and taken away.



The next gender circle contains *alma* – the soul. The nourishing mother (*alma mater*) echoes the previous arrangement, now promising the prolific breeding of souls at the next levels of life. However remote and singular each soul is, it is still one with the world soul and its secret mainstream that issues many forms of life. In *Timaeus* (36 B-E), Plato says that the world soul has the form and the impetus of the Greek letter X (chi), later called the platonic cross. As such, it has something in common with the ancient dynamic swastika and the Christian cross, however distant all three seem to be. Formed by a cross with the four ends, they are related to the four elements and four basic urges and tendencies of nature. The archetypes, chosen by God and stricken by God, descend into incarnation and into the four elements of nature, endure, and concur their quarter-phase discord, then subsequently ascent back to the atemporal. The state of the equilibrium shown in the *Greek Formula* is rarely stabilized on the physical plane. In all these variety of forms, light appears to be “pinned” to the tree of life, which has many twigs and knots.



Light seeks self-development within the matter. In the conscious order, the vertical mind desires a *horizontal* body for its expression. Thus, in the central circle, the word “*ödin*” is born of “mind” and “body.” In Scandinavian myths, that incarnation is described with the profundity and liveliness of folk wisdom. The chief of the gods, Odin, has obtained knowledge of runes by hanging for nine days on the world tree pierced by his own spear. His name is related to Slavic word “*ödin*,” which means “one” or “alone.” He has only one

eye, which blazes like the sun. He traded his other eye for a drink from the Well of Wisdom, therefore he consumes nothing but wine. On the day of the final battle, Odin will be killed. In that myth, we have one of the versions of the formation of the archetype.

L
I
E G O
H
T

At the next point, the balance appears to be resting on the crossbeam of human personality, which is closely related to the ego. Here, the ego occupies the place of “life” that it does in the original formula, but on that level it loses its unity. Life is narrowed and controlled by the desires of ego, which are plenty. Entering the so-called “great personality,” which is only partly enlightened, light enters the next stage of its pilgrimage in life. On that plane, the *Greek Formula* degrades into its shadow: the ego begins to manipulate the given power, while, not surprisingly, it egotistically hinges on the power of “light.” On its next descending steps, the light is increasingly obscured through its further personification.

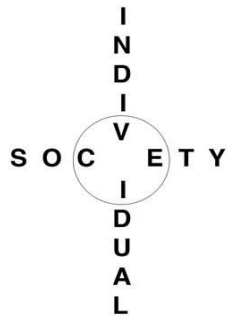
S
O O E E G O
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F

Step down, and no heroic deeds are to be expected. Here, the vertical “self” has two horizontal branches of the “ego,” the left-hand and the right-hand: while one hand is creating, the other is destroying what is created. The discordant egos clash in the cardiac zone, as if to make a rib cage out of their two back-to-back “E’s.” Now the formula takes the form of a verbal sketch of a scarecrow with the ego markedly overstretched.

There are no intervals in the whole trajectory of a fall. The forms of manifestations succeed each other by keeping a definite proportional relationship: they repeat each other in the manner of fractal geometry, as do the self and the ego. As much as the self is a kernel part in spiritual realization, the ego is a dynamo behind all drives of nature in man: it

supports his expansion and multiplication; it feeds his desire and social impulses, *fitted to fit* the frames of mass society. The ego's self-establishment is an exact opposite to self-realization. The domineering impulse of the ego is not far from the instinctual urge of a leader in a herd. What's more, the selflessness of people driven by ego, in fact, is only an intricate form of their selfishness because their altruism always has alternative intentions.

Going down the scale of objectivity, the universal forms progressively interfere with the impulses of nature, which become increasingly obscure; and that creates a contradictory core behind the paradigm of multiplication. When the Divine substance is shared with the environment full of deficiency, which is our material life, the correlation manifests in a turbulent way. Everything and especially human beings "operate" as a prism receiving the creative light, reflecting it, and embodying it within their own physical deficiencies.



In the social order of life, the middle circle contains "vice" that seems to be in no need for explanation. Yet, resorting to the dictionary, we find that "vice" has other meanings, such as "vice president" and "vise" the squeezer, both alluding to some sort of tightness, or put in human context, how tightly an individual and society are held together. In any way, all three meanings seem to be complimentary. Below the level of the ego formation, everything is gathered into a mass; mass communication, mass production, mass education. The crowd dissolves the ego, which is supplanted by the more basic faculties. Each member of the set tends to be dominated by the others due to the deficiency of his own ego now lacking so-called "animal magnetism." The arrangement is similar to that in a group of animals in which the strongest is always the leader. Not capable of equitable

arguments, a mass-man is susceptible only to authority. Following the trajectory of further dissolution, the masses begin to alternate their level of submissiveness, periodically entering the state of unruly chaos. On that shaky ground, the appearance of unity is scattered into chaotic multiplicity with the consequent dispersions and disagreements of the mob.

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C O N S T R A I N T

When the sparkles of knowledge come into the imperfect receptacle of man, his inadequate faculties of reception revolt and create havoc not only without, but also within his own organism, hence there is a great discord that periodically overwhelms the whole world. The blinded personal mind does not want to accept the impersonal light. Now the light is at the feet of the gross stony-faced life where it harshly inhibited.

Approaching the dry, crumbly earth, light penetrates organic and inorganic matter, which repeats similar patterns in its formation of the fauna, flora, and minerals. Some of these blueprints might be omitted for the sake of brevity. Crossing over the surface of the all-forming life, light supplies it with the vital impulses.

A
P
P
E
A
R
A
N
C
E
D I S A P P E A R A N C E

The lower grades represent some sort of compost that is constantly reprocessed and reconverted into a new life, which upon decaying refills that compost again.



In summary, light is constrained in matter where life appears and disappears – everything is recycled. In perpetual motion, all-fertilizing light and the great breath of life are interrelated. Similar rules are equally traceable in the archetypal realm of ideas and in the mundane world of events. The life-giving principle is timeless in essence; it enters the field of temporal activity, bringing the archetypes into time and space. On this field of temporal activity, life constantly produces seeds. Sowed in the soil, they die producing new life: other plants with other seeds, and so on. All seeds are different, but their aim is identical: matching each other, as though one domino striking another domino. Converting ends into beginnings, the seeding brings harvesting that turns all incessantly into a circle. The principle of gardening is the same, but the outcome varies in forms, qualities, and quantities. How does all this relate to the arts? In the fabric of the historical process, the artist, as any other resourceful individual, becomes a gardener who watches and cultivates growing seeds, showing their archetypal patterns in different art forms.

One of the methods used in *Photoglyphs* derived from what we see as a paradox of reality and the many illusions it generates. There is no time and no place in our works, only the “sparks of consciousness.” Going through a pursuit of assimilation of organic forms, the “sparks” discharge through the art, transmitting, so to speak, perennial messages. The module is an active part of that circuit, depicted with a sense of detachment in an artwork by its author. Generally speaking, art has its own links and bonds, developed out of an abundance of refined, esoteric, and somewhat hazardous fantasies. That is how any significant artwork of the past was connected with better and higher sources, and not in a straightforward way. Each idea has its own meta-idea, which



G-rain © 1992

tells one how to react to that idea. However elliptic that may sound, it brings some compensation for our (and, perhaps, not just our) spiritual deficiency. The imagery employed for that, considered together and separately, is synchronized with lingual and pictorial conundrums, but regardless of technique, we hope the works speak without words, and live and act on their own accord. Sometimes the images behave in a rather off-handed manner toward logic, blurring the focal point, while, as we say, just act natural. To give some quick examples of their evasive bearing, in *G-rain*, the picture of rice shower, the tiny white grains are literally g-rain-ing, replicating and blurring the features of the face. Fruits and flowers are coming from the mouth in *Cornucopia*, and, in an abrupt way, everything is frozen in the breathing sketch *After Dürer* (p. 89).

And what is this gardening if not life's sensual enjoy-

ments and everything else that man considers good and fine in physical life? With beneficial curiosity for some and unworthiness for others, people are wandering in the “garden of delights.” The garden gradually opens its secrets that are hidden in short-lived earth-bound existence and its rounds of trivialities. Though man is deeply embedded within the transient ecological scheme, in his better moments he is reminded of something superior to what he sees around him – something alluding to the descending light and the magic glow of our spiritual home. As soon as one begins to recollect that nearly forgotten light, entirely enclosed and “protected” by life’s sheathings, the question of vital necessity would pose itself: Is there way out of this basic state? In the murky depth of *samsaric* existence, the echo of an answer could come from far off, as though we were listening to something remote and transcendent, and, perhaps, even hinging on some

Cornucopia © 1991



religious mystification. Unpredictably, a momentous change of polarity might take place inside the mind. Creation comes with the pouring out of light in which particles are dispersed within the darkness of matter. After reaching a certain point, defined in biblical Greek as *metanoia* (literally a “change of mind”), these sparks of consciousness resurge and strive to return to their original place. In the most abstract terms, nature not only scatters all, but also directs the dispersed life back into its unity, submitting the chaos to the order.

Our hypothetical model suggesting an explanation of the *Greek Formula* depicts different steps of one ladder that is equally valid for going up or going down – being only a tool, it indifferently supports both processes. However, it is always easier to slide down a hill than to climb back up it. Of that, there can be no doubt. Therefore, in the movement back to the original light, the patience of any bold spirit involved in

Magnet © 1991



that enterprise is put to no small test. On the other hand, the first rule of successfully sliding down into gross matter, ever attracted by its riches, is common of man and beast; it is known under the wolfish law of survival of the fittest. When the soul begins to recover from the paralyzing influence of the struggle for existence and gradually rises in the strength of spirit, the same law of survival of the fittest works against it. For as things go, the lawbreaker offends its fundamental parameters of existence (here and now) by the very intentions of his “homecoming” consciousness. Obeying the matter oriented law, those who are the so-called “fittest” for survival begin to pursue the idealistic transgressor, gradually seeding for him misery of every kind on every step. Moreover, the neophyte’s own ego, which is secretly engaged with his libido, also turns into his own antagonist. With this, incidentally or deliberately, one experiences some karmic precipita-

After Dürer © 1990



tions that can create all kinds of mental misgivings not easily met even with the grimmest type of humor. But at present, that need not hold our attention. The main point is that after a bewildering excursion into the depth of matter, the soul begins the whole thing afresh, rising up and putting aside all intensions of a disagreeable ego, both of one's own source and of the collective export. To paraphrase it poetically, those who want to trace back the full trajectory must turn their mind into a lantern that shines on their own feet.

In the beginning of this chapter, we proposed that the module modulates itself, which is always reflected in its immediate setting. Not only God's will, to give a story a theological slant, but also some kind of architectonic unit operates behind the all executing and all surrounding nature. There is an elusive standard in measuring and controlling the valve of nature's cornucopia, in channeling and closing its abundance of fruits and flowers, and it might be well added here, exercising some control over nature's appetizing camouflaging of all that we are not supposed to see and to know.

Let us now look at the idea of a module in nature (or some kind of it) and how it appeared in Valeriy's early work based on the archetypal forms. Some of them have sprung from his visual experiences, while others having no empirical



V. G., *Leaf*, 1976, 14 x 9 1/2 x 1";
Pear and Cherry, 1975, 8 x 5 1/2 x 1", steel erector set, glass, paper, cardboard, text



origin, were strictly abstract ideas. The form, even if it is a conceptual one, gives the thing being. Precisely that factor defined his interest not in the reflecting diversity of forms that allow many options within options, but in their marrow, their prime elements, and principles that constitute the phenomenal world. Using metal erector sets, made with pinpoint precision in East Germany, he assembled different linear forms, objects, and three-dimensional scenes; some of them are mounted on metal pedestals from music stands, while others are displayed on the wall in glass cases in the manner of butterfly collections. Lacking an alluring descriptive content, the erector set objects embody the line of consistent abstractions in sculptural forms. They are generated following the recursive functions of the fractal language of nature; and as such, they emphasize the general and eliminate the temporal. The analytical “portraits” of natural phenomena dictate certain visual bareness; hence, many of them look like linear drawings made not with a pencil but with the string of metal lines.

Nature never ceases to amaze with wonders that lend themselves to fractal repetition. So it was his approach to its language of forms in that series. This strange world of artistic beauty was frozen into the erector sets like into stone, aiming

V. G., *Ant* and *Caterpillar*, 1976, 12 x 9 x 1 1/4", steel erector set, glass, cardboard, paper, text. *Ant*, collection Zimmerli Art Museum, NJ; *Caterpillar*, The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow



to show the universality of different phenomena. The abyss or division between divinity and humanity is filled with a variety of intermediate archetypes, which run the gamut from live beings to inanimate objects. Destruction of a form is not necessary a destruction of its archetype; on the contrary, all forms are individual and mortal, while their archetypes are objectified and perpetuated. Thus, in depicting the fundamental qualities of objects and ideas, it is possible to strip them of the affections of the senses, bringing them closer to the Kantian qualities of a thing-in-itself, in which the unique, imperishable matrixes multiplied by time and space become innumerable perishable objects. The inner nature of things can be fully reflected only in the consciousness and is not strictly identical with that which our eyes see. Our mind is the device that allows us to abbreviate the informational content of that world in order not to sink in the indiscriminate accumulation of every possible fact and image. The blueprints of ideas abide in our memory storage; therefore, their live representations can be easily recognized in art, especially in its conceptual branch.

Valeriy Gerlovin with his
works, Moscow, 1976





V.G., *A Garden*, 1975, erector set on the stand, steel, enamel, 10 x 10 x 4", stand 45" high, collection Zimmerli Art Museum, Rutgers University, NJ

Highlighting only the essential ingredients as being necessary for the understanding of the whole, one comes closer to a possibility of creating such forms that should rather be called meta-forms. What if we view a garden through the erector set *A Garden*, look at its greens through the skeleton of its brunches, the crowns of the trees through their roots – following the road of the matriarchal nature via its patriarchal seed? Thus, the metal scenery of *A Garden* includes the familiar setting: the luminary, the ever digging out earth *anthropos*, fauna, and flora. Logos in the material world does not have a body or form; it has neither smell, nor color, however due to its existence, the very embodiment is possible. We see it – and our feelings are occupied with endless activity.

It is possible to reflect the modes of being in an abstract and removed manner, even so the distance may vary from micro to macro as in the sculptures *A Spermatozoon* and *Lightening*. Both of them are not things, as we perceive them;



V.G., *A Spermatozoon*, 1974, 1 1/2 x 5 x 1/4"; right; *Lightning*, 1975, 11 1/2 x 23 1/2 x 1/4", erector set, stand 45" high, steel, enamel

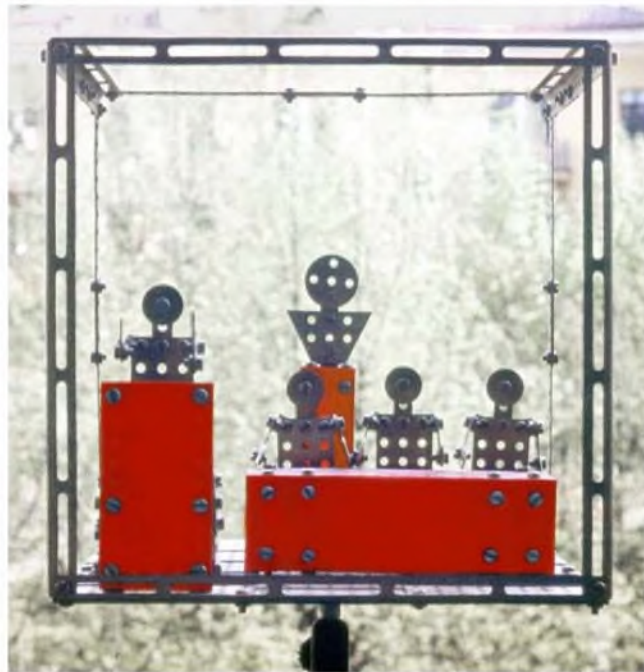
their energy is stored in the phenomenal universe in a state of non-existence for our physical senses. A bolt of lightning and a spermatozoon can be viewed in equal ratio to each other as objective and subjective forces symbolically showing the same penetrating, fiery power of nature: one demonstrated in the sky, the other in the human organism. Brought out of the natural supply, the conceptual images of these two zigzags typify the incisive force that discharges into the life following the least dense areas. In the Stoics view, both non-organic and organic nature is the same “physis” enliven by all-penetrating pneuma or vital spirit that, taking variety of forms, animates the upper and the lower regions of life, both its inner and outer resources.

A Spermatozoon and its relative *Embryo* are literally collected from the little filial parts of an erector set and are made into whole paternal and maternal forms. Consistent with the fractal vision, we may call the former a collective “imago” of spermatozoon. That single item of reproduction – one of the minute motile gametes that everybody has heard about but rarely seen – was enormously magnified and established on a metal stand, thus obtaining a new status equal to *The Nose* depicted in the namesake novel by Nikolai Gogol – that notorious nose which separated from its progenitor and obnoxiously lived by itself. (Incidentally, the nose is also a

euphemism for a sexual element.) In such context, the erector set conspicuously evokes an alternative meaning of the word “erect.” Adding another chapter to its biography in 1977, *A Spermatozoon* “participated” in the photo-performance made in the subway and on the crowded streets of Moscow.

Condensing different descriptive materials of life into compact visual symbols and signs, it was possible to touch varieties of subjects: from esoteric themes to strictly social as in the erector-set mise en scène *A Party Meeting*, which geometrizes not only the setting but also the sociological structure of the events that shaped the political history of the Soviet Union. Having graduated as a stage designer from the School-Studio of the Moscow Art Theater of Stanislavsky (MKhAT), Valeriy often applied his learned skill of making hyperrealistic scale models. The scenery is locked within a

V.G., *A Party Meeting*, 1975, erector set on the stand 45" high, steel, plastic, enamel, 10 x 10 x 8", collection of The Museum of The Berlin Wall, Berlin, Germany



cubic structure fixed on the stand: in the tri-part composition, the front is occupied by an anonymous speaker standing behind the tribune; at the rear three other figures sit behind the red table, while the background belongs to the bust of the leader. In short, it is a social shell of our past, which was not yet obsolete at that moment.

It remains to add that our artworks are never intended as a parody, which reduces art to historical illustrations. Such

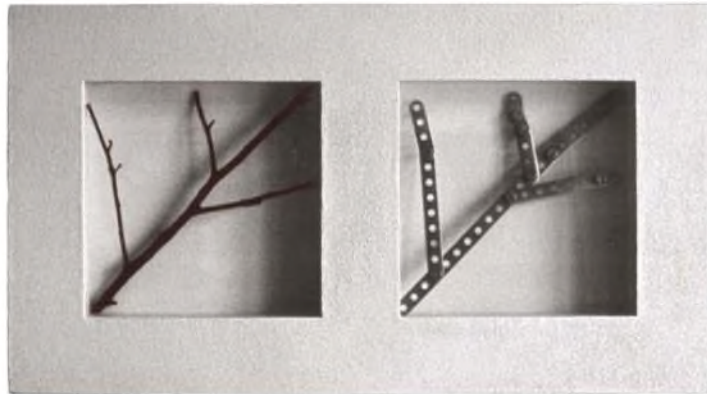


V.G., *The Metamorphosis of the Frog*, 1979, metal erector set, cardboard, glass, 14 1/2 x 20 x 2"

style bombastically preoccupies many artists who seem to ride on the centaur of hate and love to the object of their parody. Our language is a language of the diagnostic interpretation, and as such, it allows us not only to make concepts out of atemporal reality, but also to create symbols out of its temporal concepts. We operate on abstractions, but are not burdened by them, using typical rather than actual historical precursors.

Following his lapidary style, Valeriy “dried” two branches of a tree, a real one and its stainless-steel replica, displaying

them in correlation to each other in two windows in the herbarium titled *Branch*. Broadly speaking, the work is an icon of vegetation. The metal facsimile of the tree limb is intended to show the underlying perpetual scheme behind the temporal decaying form of nature. Fortunately, the unique branch will not raise the question, as each of us individuals might do: Am I like the rest after all? Some conceptual objects of that series are refined down to a point and are scientifically bizarre. One does not need a degree in zoology to recognize how, in *The Metamorphosis of the Frog*, three metal amphibians depict



V.G., *Branch*, 1975, tree branch,
metal, mazonite, glass, enamel,
10 x 18 x 1 1/2"

the sequence of the mutation from tadpole to fully-grown frog. Touching natural life in order to spring from it, the objects depict how every thing is conceived to make the least possible room for free will. Certainly, several levels of meaning must be distinguished here. Conferring upon one's own existence a mental status, combined with ethical and contemplative virtues, human beings become less vulnerable to that principle.

All these erector-set organisms, under disguise of bio-herbariums or as bare as they are, are decoding the seals and

fragmentations that might be termed “the geometry of nature.” The best theoretical model of it is described by the fractal relationship of everything to everything, wherein big and small repeat each other albeit on a different scale. Partitioned into the manageable pieces of the erector sets, these sculptures carry the scale alongside the fragmentation. The bits and pieces of the erector sets can be assembled into one coherent whole; at the same time, their order contains a multiplicity of subordinated parts whose precision and structure exhibit a certain relationship to mathematical sets.



V.G., *Apple*, 1975, steel erector set, enamel, 11 x 10 x 1/2", stand 45" high

Perhaps some parallelism in the artistic openness to the general outflow of world ideas can be seen in the fact that Fractal Geometry dates to 1975 – the same year that the erector sets “flowed” from Valeriy. In fact, we would hesitate to call that theory new and original; it rather brought back in vogue the old time idea of proportional multiplication in the natural order, which has been explored by the Pythagoreans and known in the eastern traditions. The laws underlying the regularities of nature can be shown not only by formulas but also by the intuitive artistic investigation that is similar to the impact of music, described by Leibniz as the pleasure the human soul experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting.

In 1976, the erector-set sculptures played a fatal role in Valeriy’s performance *Interring*. The guiding star of this

action was nature itself; if carried to the extreme one can revert to its central law, which dictates that nothing can be preserved here on earth *ad eternum*. Any culture, however rich, can be only a temporal pattern of life. Considering the fact that every order that follows a recurrent chaos only precedes another chaos, he played the sequence in four movements: the assembly and display of the works, and their subsequent disassembly and burial. Thus, the metal works that bear the seal of art and of nature were literally returned to their source, eventually becoming ore fossils. Preserving the general scenario of life that buries all that it produces, he rotated it on a much higher speed. Did he get a speeding ticket? Probably, yes. But he was not alone: the meticulous sand drawings made by the Buddhist monks in the open air were not intended for long lives, either.

V.G., *Interring*, performance in Izmailovsky Park, Moscow , 4.26.1976, clockwise : the artworks are exhibited and demounted, placed into the hole, and interred. Photo: Viktor Novatsky



5: SPECTRUM

In the diffused magic of light, every color speaks its own language – that’s what immediately comes to sight if we move the *Greek Formula* from a theoretical field onto an empirical pasture that is rich with many obvious details. *Spectrum*, as its title might imply, is both a spectrogram and an optical device in one person, as literal as that might be. Passing through the human medium, light splits into several degrees of spectral fragmentation, its rays imparting colorful dynamism when superimposed over the rest of the carbon black background that empties the face of all expression. Fashioned by nature into a certain shape, the face, which participates here as a metaphor, is always a visual extension of the personality. All is within the territory of visual art.

Running the risk of inconvenience, we have to reintroduce that story into a systematic language of facts, leastwise useful in making an amalgam of aesthetical illusion and optical vision. The ray of light contains the entire spectrum (“spectacle,” Lat.) or, in other words, one ray conceals itself under seven colors composing it. In that colorful spectacle of life, science promises us that the human eye can distinguish some ten million colors. Still, our retina responds only to light from 780 nm (nanometers) of red color to 390 nm of violet; everything else beyond these numbers would be infrared or ultraviolet, both inaccessible to the eye of flesh that can see no more than the physical and sensory world. In that light, only the mind’s eye is capable of distinguishing some other ranges on the symbolic level.

In our spectral analyses painted on the face, the prism of the nose “chisels” the rainbow of the world, refracting light into a bundle of colored rays. Psychologically, the prism of the ego might serve not only for the separation from the essential source, but also for the projection of the created world. With that, we touch the philosophic mystery known as “the one and the many.” Life on different planes appears merely as different states of vibration that are processed by the ego on the level of the low degrees of awareness. It supervises both multiplication and individuation, while extracting the full set of imaginary values, singularities, and colorful



Spectrum © 1989

details from the whole. In other words, ego is a prism for the whole spectrum of life. It also implies that human vision has rather limited excess to the world spectrum.

In static form, the image shows the dynamic passage of light. If we follow the movement of the eye along the white light, we enter another range of vision. It is like moving on the beam of a focused conscious force and crossing the barrier that opens up another realm of unconscious content within a fascinating and playful mess that multiplies, invites, and traps the ray of pure light. Also, contrasts between the spectral colors of life can be in harmony as much as they can be in a cacophony: they might even be in the Montagues – Capulets feud or entirely blurred and disappearing. It all depends on a quality of the prism. If it functions properly, the phrase “let thy heart be light!” would not be a mere display of words, but justify a way of living.



Invisible © 1991

From the artistic point of view, it would not be interesting enough for us to reproduce an experiment on the face if there was not something transcendent behind it that gives it a sense of mystery. If the aura of that mystery is reflected in contemplative art, the science provides the factual material. Precisely at the color juncture, the nose takes on the appearance and function of the famous prism of Isaac Newton, who was the first to refract light into a bundle of colored rays. (For clarity, we have to revert to otherwise distilled encyclopedic facts, balancing the subject of the spectrum between the optics and the arts.) Contrary to his objective of viewing color as a physical property only, J. W. Goethe suggested that we must consider the active subjective role of the brain processing all information. What we see of an object depends not only on the object and the light, but also on our means of perception. As a scientist, Goethe came to the important analyti-

cal statement; as a poet, he knew that the power of perception is the prime vehicle for poetry and art. Even those who mainly think and reason cannot function without simple perception and, hopefully, without the arts. Who can avoid the involuntary neurological processing of impressions from the spectacle of life that orchestrates our environment?

There are two forms of vision: the centralized one and the dispersed one; and both are reflected in the mirror of mythology. If centralized vision is attributed to the eye of the Ancient Egyptian sun god Horus, then dispersed vision belongs to the compound eye of moon goddess Isis that has many lenses and spectral varieties. Grossly speaking, the compound eye of a mayfly also forms multiple images, inverted and seen only at a very short distance. Such bizarre facts do not reverse the truth, but rather add some colors to the spectral richness extended into the low life forms. There,

7 Fingers of Spectrum © 1996



the focusing light seemingly loses its focus. At a certain point, the concept of the absolute seems to be utterly deluded with the notions of time, space, motion, causality, and relativity. In that “light,” all things seem to differ drastically from their original state. And what is then the entire spectrum? A dream that is dreaming itself?

On the metaphoric level, the spectrum is just another colorized version of the formula of light and life. The seven spectral colors seem to correspond to different metaphysical gradations of energy in nature, such as, seven chakras in the Indian tradition, ten *sephiras* in kabalistic teaching, or thirty-three degrees in freemasonry. They all have different overtones of some other meaning invested with the semblance of spiritual reality. The ladder of Jacob has many steps leading to separations and the same amount of steps for reintegration. In that context, the splitting of light into the colors might be perceived as a back and forth movement, as though a roundtrip synchronized with the rhythm of a clock’s pendulum. Imagine how the white light visits its own outer limits, revitalizing its beam-ends; and, at the end of the day, it comes back home. The length of the day depends on who is measuring it: gods, men, or moths. Moreover, too much security and too much insecurity in the material world (correspondingly idleness and depression) make the reverse of vision barely possible. It takes a great focus of will and many years of hard struggle to become skilled at distinguishing the real from the many-colored pigments of imagination coming through the prismatic “nose” of our own personality.

After springing up in gaudy multiplicity, all colors are integrated back into the white light, the one ultimate inclusive source that symbolically is closest to the summit of being. There is no final division between the white light and its spectral diffusion, just as there is no strict separation of mind and matter. The colors exist and exist not, they are different, but they are all white as well. It is an interlacement of the most subliminal order. The light of the creation is split into the spectrum of the created, remaining the same in the sum and in the parts.

The archetypal self-portrait with the abbreviated title *Selfport* is based on the well-known law of physics: when the circle is in a static position, the colors of the spectrum are perceptible; if the head is rotated, the spectrum becomes

blurred and fused into gray. When motionless, this wooden head, in comparison to a real human head with thoughts at rest, is a reposing circle composed of clear and bright spectral colors. To change the metaphor, an inward pause can break the force of mundane conditioning revealing the spectrum of intuitive faculties. If the head-circle is spun, its rotating thoughts blur the spectrum: the swifter the rotary, the grayer the spectacle becomes. The color scale, within which we can see, is spread between the “infernial” infrared and the radiating ultraviolet light; the rest is invisible. In rotation, even that small visible interval becomes focused-foggy. Speedy life obstructs the distinction of things; with this, we enter a circle of manifold restless motion of the world as though obeying a mechanical law. Each goal is followed by another in an endless strife to win. Whirling thoughts, chance meetings, incidental events – all pour into the head from every direction and swarm like ants. To regain the correct vision and recognize the live spectrum, one has to slow down and keep a

R. G., *Selfport*, shown in two positions : in rest and in rotation blending all colors , 1987, wood, acrylic, 23 x 16 x 4"



moderate pace, neither succumbing to inertia and latency in the arms of Morpheus, nor turning into one of the units of a restless activity of mass consciousness. The world is livable – many see nothing more plausible but to stand securely in it, having no authority over their spinning thoughts. On the



Fire Keeper © 1997

other hand, even if the performer has no far-reaching plan in the performance, the latter has it. When time is ripe, the mechanical law is reversed, and gradually our consciousness frees itself from the temporal aspects of events.

Delineated by the surrounding symbolic blackness, the illuminating radiance of light might come as a beam, so it is depicted letter-by-letter in the photograph *Be-am*. In the form of a signal transmitted along a narrow course, a ray of light guides pilots through the darkness, indicating wireless passage. In the beginning, darkness was hidden in darkness

before all-powerful light pierced its landscape. In the shade covering the whole face, we left a gleam of natural skin. Only the eyes are left visible, like a surgeon in a mask. Split into two parts, this word encloses an existential meaning: it contains the imperative “be” and the responding affirmative



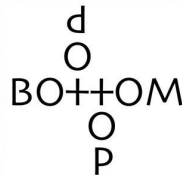
Be-am © 1990

“am.” The command is not defined yet; maybe it is “let it be” or even “be it as it were.” Confirming the existence of “I,” “am” is separated from its source and yet it remains a part of it. However far the sun ray is extended from its source, it still belongs to the Sun.

The *Be-am* is captured on the blackened human face in the manner of a camera obscura that receives different projections in its dark chamber through a pinhole. Altering the position of our projection from horizontal to vertical, we may interpret the same ray in a different frequency – as a standing

wave of higher energy in which the mystics search for union, the soft spot on the head, ascribed in Hindu lore to the “thousand petalled” *Sahasrara* chakra, which, as their ageless manuscripts declare, sheds a nectarous ray in the great void. In the European tradition, Aristotle was the first to observe that the smaller the external hole, the sharper the image, as in the modern camera. Following Aristotle’s proposition, shall we deduce that the mind enlightened through a wide opening to the outside world has a less focused understanding, and is therefore left to wander like a strayed sheep? The brighter and more concentrated mind is usually content to have only a small vent open to the common ways of the world, in order to receive its sharpest projection.

Instead of regarding the bittersweet scenario of the world in a gloomy manner, the images rather co-play in its plots. For example, staging “the marriage of heaven and hell,” we turned the letter “H” into a moderator that fuses the polarities by “marrying” them at the dividing line. Half above, half below, it is a one-step ladder, equally suitable for ascent or descent. Two opposing words read in different directions, each towards its final destination. One thing is certain, that leading down “hell” is easily readable, while leading up (and therefore inverted) “heaven” is more difficult to grasp.



Naturally, that concept is quite susceptible to allegorical interpretations, and some of them are worth pondering. The picturesque idea of Emanuel Swedenborg gives a dramatic illustration of the *paradisus* vs. *infernus* case. He suggested that the devils appear to the angels to be inverted (upside down), while to the devils the reverse is the case. Suppose we accept this hierarchy of spiritual beings as a symbolic expression of different forces that operate in our everyday life, such as truth vs. falsity, charity vs. avarice, or sympathy vs. aggression, and so on. Why, then, cannot the carriers of these powers assume an angelic or demonic form having an anthropomorphic appearance, especially when we talk in mythological or religious terms? On the same ground, all kinds of

forces can be transmitted through our immediate surroundings: through people, fauna, and flora, and through the benevolent and sinister play of nature. Not only that, the binary forces might not only interact *without* but also *within* - i.e. inside one personality, not necessarily split.

Now then, if we allow ourselves a fantasy not so unreasonable, the united many can appear as an immense one. According to the source mentioned above, “the devil is not an archfiend, but [is] hell in the aggregate”, and its agents are “never prevented from entering heaven, but they find its atmosphere so suffocating that they immediately rush headlong down to hell again, where they can breathe more freely... They are naturally quite out of their element in heaven... This is because opposite acts against opposite.”¹⁵ Needless to say, psychotherapy has its strong opinion on this account too. Rather distant from a theodicean mood of seeing

Heaven-Hell © 1989



goodness in the creation, C.G. Jung was sure that “only an infantile person can pretend that evil is not at work everywhere, and the more unconscious he is, the more the devil drives him.”¹⁶ Swinging the pendulum, we might add if there is no end in the present world, there will be none in the next. That is why, perhaps, the prophetic phantasmagorias of Swedenborg, particularly the image of “hell in the aggregate,” have some technical similarity with Dante's ingenious visions of the world to come. In his *Paradiso*, heaven is intensely human – it is depicted as one man in whom countless people are the members of his body, altogether making one person.

Taking another twist, the related work *Paradisus* spotlights three metaphoric zones, graphically synchronizing the words with the colors allotted to them. Starting at the transparent top, the eye then moves through the unquiet streak of red and plunges into the lethargic black. The well-known plot can take the intuition further: *paradisus* blooms in the peaceful landscape of man's imagination, *purgatorium* gives him a bath in volcanic lava, while *infernus* paralyzes. Characteristic of both outer and inner conditioning, the three strata might be explored simultaneously, in sequence, or at random, through apparently accidental but in reality purposeful events. For those who are acquainted with Hindu theories, the association calls up the concept of three *gunas* representing *sattvic*, *rajasic*, and *tamasic* states of being. The same put in simple words – there are people who yearn for an inspired and ennobling existence (*sattvic*), and those whose lives are bloody intense, red hot active, and highly visible (*rajasic*); however, great masses of people live out their lives in a dull, colorless, and loveless stupor (*tamas*). This is not all. The painted black abyss stands for the harrowing gates of hell that bear the words, rendered by Dante with the solemn Italian melody: “*Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch' intrate*” (“Abandon all hope, you who enter here”). If there is great misery in empty hope, there is even greater misery in hopelessness. We wouldn't go into that, but will add that each of us, at least once in a lifetime, make a visit to certain gloomy areas of human experience beyond the horizon of a normal life.

What interests us more are not the absolute disconsolate moments, but the flow of sensations that impinge upon our senses in the workaday world in an unending stream;



Paradisus © 1989

meaning that behind the scenes of man's theater of consciousness, the *Divine Comedy* is always on. It is played symbolically on the backstage of the mind and for better or for worse, it grows into a habit and manifests in the simple facts of life. Both the imagination and the dramatized responses of all sorts of events can fit into one or the other proposed categories that also may twine and trine resourcefully. Some people are capable of swinging from the elated to the hellish state of mind in no time, while others linger or are even stuck permanently in one of these moods. That comedy is not only of the divine origin, but also of our own psychic dimension, in which everyone makes his own heaven and his own hell. On a mundane level, the psychological heaven-purgatory-hell compound might be reduced to a simple pleasure-pain complex and the various states in-between and betwixt.

The three symbolic strata are painted on the face almost

like the frescos on the walls of churches in which warning murals are usually overcrowded by realistic images of saints and sinners, whereas our photographic concept *Paradisus* is verbalized and reduced to a single witness. Both the subject and the object, he is more realistic and alive than any painted



Yellow Triangle © 2000,
double exposure with
petals of chrysanthemum

figure – the idea was simply staged on the face. Dramatized by blowing-up the highlighted features of the stage performer, it does not prove anything but carries its own well-known symbolism around like a snail carries its house. The concept is neither locked within the religious frame, nor inside psychological dimensions of consciousness, and might

be interpreted in various ways.

What if we look at the picture of *Paradisus* from a historic perspective, tallying the three layers with the major archeological periods? It goes like this: From deep down, the Paleozoic zone of fishes, reptiles and insects, the scene develops



Fisherwoman © 2000,
double exposure with
petals of chrysanthemum

into the blood red Mesozoic era of mammals and birds, and finally depicts our Cenozoic time of mankind that, as expected, has to think with its own head. But there's more to it. All this history is engraved into our brain, which keeps the subconscious memories of a reptilian "hellish" condition, the middle state of dynamic quadrupeds, and, certainly, all types

of primates, including *homo sapiens*. Being a measure of all things (the universe is not excluded), man might be viewed both as a final summarizing product of evolution on the Earth and also as an original seed of higher consciousness with unbound potentiality. He is a seed, which needs to pass through all these forms of life drama to attain virtual perfection. With this, we had better pull down the curtains of the playhouse of the mind and move outside into a somewhat objective zone.

To inject a note on the chronological sequence in the development of that idea, *Paradise, Purgatory, Hell* is also the title of the interactive cubic poem made by Rimma back in the 1970s. That strictly conceptual object, rather characteristic of our early days of youth and vigor in Moscow, shares the same libretto with what is discussed above regarding the photograph made later in New York. Consisting of the grid of cells, the work looks like a flattened honeycomb that is filled with sixty small cubes bearing the names of different famous personalities. They are drifting between the layers of a not yet final destination, though fixed and infinite at the same time. The set of chosen celebrities includes such names as Socrates, Nefertiti, Galileo, Joan of Arc, Nietzsche, Napoleon, Raphael, Nobel, Confucius, Lincoln, Ramses XVI, Gagarin, the Beatles (all four in one unit), and many others. And, of course, there is Dante himself, the guide and expert in afterlife judgments. As with all other cubic poems, this work is supposed to be handled by spectators who have their own choice in the arrangements of the cubes, passing the judgments on the condition that only names are mortal.

Introducing the same concept from different perspectives, the two works are oddly dissimilar: the object is objective in all senses, employing “facelessly” impersonal dynamic tactics, while the photograph is done with the spell of introspection, with the “facefully” personal static approach. In the first case, every new spectator influences the luck of the white block figures, determining their zonal traveling within the game-like black and white board. In terms of the figures, not one of them does better than the other. They are not moving – they are moved, always uncertain in the face of nature and art. The glory of the posthumous world is also fleeting. In the static photographic version and its intense personal impulse, the multitudes of names have sunk

into a singularity of one face representing them all. One human “module” plays all roles simultaneously, compressing the three acts of the play into the three-colored zones marked on the face-centered stage. The event of one soul might be applicable to the whole of mankind. In a similar connection,



R. G., *Paradise, Purgatory, Hell*, 1976, wood, cardboard, paper, 22 x 16 1/2 x 1", collection The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

the micro world of a persona expresses the macro world of humanity.

All that exists appears as some kind of celestial distribution of forces working on all levels: from the upper realms where “the peace that passeth all understanding,” to the

infernal regions, mildly identified in theology as *pivatio boni* (the absence of good and God, Lat.). It seems that the awareness of these categories is imposed on us by our consciousness, the immanent conclusion of which is that at the end people are divided not by nationalities but by consciousness, here and everywhere. These stipulations, which indeed might be called the divine comedy, reflect much higher planes and arrangements than we see in the regular visible life and, certainly, in that honeycomb-like object. Yet, the question remains valid: why and how is their honey distributed among the honeycombs of drastically different qualities? We do not pretend to know the arrangement of the sacred realities – perhaps everything is as it should be – but we are open to views that are worthy of note, *zum Biespiel*, the opinion of Jacob Böhme, who in principle liked to give answers to questions like this. “God brings Himself out of Himself into a divisibility in order that a contrariety may arise in the emanation, that the good may in the evil become perceptible, effectual, and capable of will; namely to will to separate itself from the evil.”¹⁷

Must one descend into the realm of evil in order to separate oneself from it? And altogether, do the upper forces ever reach the lowest regions? If we stay within the frame of the visual arts, numerous suggestive pictures of that sort might come to mind, from Ancient Egyptian and Greek artifacts to the relatively recent Renaissance period when the Savior was often depicted descending into the limbo. For an ordinary mortal, the dangerous meddling in typography of the netherworld may turn out badly since the confrontation produced by that invasion might be unpredictable in terms who would be afflicting whom. The psychological aspect concerns not only attempts of unsafe communications with the dead or some other “supernaturals,” but also hallucinogenic trips and hypnosis under which the hopes abandoned in the abode of lost dreams might be resurrected only to cause further anxiety and distress. The attempts of spiritualization of the lower subconscious regions often end in miscarriages, whether they are made with personal confidence or under the guidance of self-promoted prophets, clever analysts, or sensitive psychics, themselves often misguided or, in the worst scenario, fraudulent. Anyone who wants to control the dangerous subconscious areas of good and evil – the gradation of

which appears to be built upon shifting sands – must be an individual with a sufficiently subordinated ego. What is more, without the complete surrender of the personal ego, there can be no inflow of spirit and grace necessary to have a safe trip to the limbo, objectified in the visible world in



Tic-tac-toe © 1990. Every victory harbors its tongue-tied loss; and the game is never over. The old puzzle of squaring the circle in a dualistic world.

unlucky events or created in one's own mind.

Art can fill the place of metaphysical needs without too much thought. Artists do not give definite answers to lofty inexorable questions, content to simply bring their magic wave to their artworks. With that in mind, let us return to the paradise-purgatory-hell complex and its dangerous land of imagination. One more *Cubic Organism* accordingly titled

the *Divine Comedy* literally embodies a purgatorial metropolis – crowded, public, and impersonal. Its centrifugal nature realistically mirrors our human race and time altogether with their standard products and urban tendency towards the “too-muchness” of everything. The description of the artwork in one sentence: the vertical figure represents an anthropomorphic map of Manhattan, on which the spectator can move two soft cubes bearing the illustrious names: “Dante” is the green cube, and “Virgil” (already being a shadow) is grey.

To understand the undercurrent layers of that allegory we have to dive deeper into history. According to Ancient Greek mysteries, the realm of Hades not only symbolizes the world beyond, but also represents the world that currently surrounds us – especially in its detrimental aspects. Estimating these aspects, the mind would be vulnerably zigzagging over countless topics, beginning with an individual experience of turbulent pressure of life with its discordant concord, and ending with more general logarithms of the collective fortune and misfortune of humanity, closely related to man’s carnal instinct of self-preservation and the gross physicality of life per se. In short, that is the mystery of the distorted divinity of the world and its plutocracy, protected by countless sheaths of maya.

Slightly withdrawing its curtain, let us scan some of the principles and morals of the world ruled by Pluto, whose name literally means “riches,” and the reaches of the earth in which Hades dwells. Animated by “dead” souls with inconclusive but selfish opinions on every possible subject, that night side of life also has its own civilization with its symbolic paradise, purgatory, and hell. What is a civilized life, if it does not lean on equality, liberty, and justice, but has somewhat of a purgatorial smell? In all fairness, such an arrangement represents the intermediate state that links the two extreme frequencies of heavenly fantasies and hellish phantasms. Precisely, that kind of “in the middle” way usually prevails in cozy metropolitan habits. So now, if we look back at the sculptural version of *Divine Comedy* standing up as a one-man-city, the conceptual package of its catholic idea would not be too confusing. Ruled according to modern astrological guesses by Pluto and having an elongated “intestinal” shape, Manhattan seems to suggest itself as

an anthropomorphic model of the city. The green “Central Park” is comfortably located in the abdomen of that figure. The world is dressed up in the desires of the flesh – Manhattan especially.

Imagine (or rather take it as a fact) that each large city is surrounded by quite heavy pollution, not only of an indust-



R. G., *Divine Comedy*, 1984, wood, canvas, foam, wires, acrylic, 82 x 32 x 5". Two soft cubes move within the cells of the anthropomorphic map of Manhattan. Dante is represented with the green cube, Virgil, being already a shadow, is grey.

rial kind, but also of a psychic nature. That psychosomatic dross is produced and accumulated by the millions of its citizens as mental, emotional, or physical stress, caused by anxiety, depression, overwork, and, inconceivable or not, quite a good deal more. The city is exhaling and inhaling that already exhausted air, which insalubrious accumulation cannot be cleared or sufficiently diminished by philanthropy, refreshing waves of juvenile idealism, or left-wing enthusiasm in politics. Neither noble benevolence of some, nor wisdom of rare loners will be of much help. The collective fume is self-reproducing in centrifugal abundance: people constantly generate psychic waste, while simultaneously feeding on it, as if they are dazed – dazed by their own unholy curiosity towards any malformation in nature, by their morbid pleasure in watching televised war cruelty, endless frauds, and all forms of perversity. Mass information and its

Aware of War © 1989





Real Apple © 1996

ever-promising aspirations, which always have a strong smell of power and politics, cannot change the problem of evil, if not the otherwise.

The phenomenon of purgatory might be looked at from different points of view: from the position of one who is purged and one who is purging. Perhaps we add another dimension to that thought, suggesting that the purgatory might be a bona fide paradise for all kinds of fiends, who are there in full control and have their hands on all the ropes of life, including those with nooses. Some eerie design in the universal way of things grants them freedom of action, plenty of opportunities, and until drop-dead entertainment. In outbursts of sociability, that limbo of vanity expands, turning it into a cultural center of civilized barbarism. As always, art is in tune with life and ready to entertain the bored audience with artistic beastliness. Any large city is full of extremes, the

extremes of power, poverty, and riches. On the latter account, Thomas Mann said in *Magic Mountain*, filtering his thoughts through the mouth of Jesuit Naphtha: "Every rich man was either a thief or the heir of a thief." The history of human purgatory repeats the same patterns of internal unrest and external disorder. Any improvement attempted from the "above" (the financial top of the society) ends up in a profanation, but if the rioting "below" takes lead, life turns into chaos of much bigger proportion. Neither skepticism nor vague aspiration can shield the social animal in man from his involuntary blind struggle for surviving in the blind gut of matter.

Nevertheless, the object *Divine Comedy* is pessimistic only to a certain degree. The figure of Dante reminds us about his free status in the "divine comedy" of life. Besides, he journeys not only through the circles of *inferno* and *purgatorio*, but Beatrice, who takes place of Virgil, guides him through a much better place. We noticed (as a matter of parenthetical fact) that not many went as far as reading Dante's *Paradiso*, circling in mind mainly within *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*. As it is prescribed to the pilgrims, he is wandering in this material world, but he is not of it, thus conforming to the same parameters of perennial teaching. Even if the world is a mirror of the human soul, the labyrinths of its multiple reflections are quite misleading. For those who recognize these reflecting qualities of life, the wandering becomes temporal. With mortifying symbolism, Gospel of Thomas yields much of the same idea: "Whoever has come to understand the world has found only a corpse, and whoever has found a corpse is superior to the world" (56). There is no need to bring that thought towards a narrative conclusion, which only the unwise would put into words.

When one takes his philosophy into the world, all concepts need some discretion in moderation, not only in terms of their visual overloading and impressive impulses, but also in too hopeful idealism and excessive criticism. Has it always been that way? Many early myths of the past screened the dark side and the witching hours of the night, showing mainly a creative relationship between light and darkness without the consequences of wandering between the cause and the effect. In that context, the Oceanic myth about the daylight deity Qat especially fascinates with its seem-

ingly childish skew towards hyperrealist details. Tired of creating the world, energetic Qat decided to buy nighttime from the queen of the night to allow some hours for rest and recuperation. After the long journey underneath, he succeeded to exchange a pig for a piece of nighttime. And that is



Compass © 1989

how it came to pass: night blackened his eye, taught him how to sleep, and how to make the dawn. His brothers cried, “Are we dying?” The answer was, “No, you are just sleeping.”

... Sleeping in the objective world of wakefulness from which we part at death. As to pigs, the Buddhists warn us that riding pigs, cocks, and snakes on the *samsara* carousel would bring us nowhere. But orientation in the world is impossible without adequate means and stimuli, and even a plant grows in response to light. And what about a response to inner light? Reasoning in that direction, we depicted our *Compass* on the

slumbering face, reorienting its finger-needles towards the magnetic center. Suggesting an odd piece of speculation, that red and blue image is still transparent enough to see it through. In the world of contradictions, the *inner sense* encompasses outside directions. From whence comes inspiration? From an external source come only the stimuli pointing in all directions: northeast, southwest... or changing a bad for a worse – a cuckoo's nest.

The reverse of the normal direction of sense perception (from the external to the internal) is conducive to concentration and solitude, which are always in direct proportion to intellectual capacity. It is not a timeline of events, at least not in their mechanical chronology. Yet, the worlds of matter and mind are alike in terms of their many contradictions. To enhance them, the palette of *Compass* is reduced to two vivid colors: the cold blue light of the North and the red-hot blaze of the South. The compass is handy, at least in a literal sense of this word; austere and personally magnetized, it evidently bears the elements of the cross. The pointing needles are inverted according to the rule: as within, so without – for in the primal relationship, East and West, North and South do not clash. Trying to calibrate our concept aesthetically, we depicted the dynamic play of the forces on the face, where their cross-wheel brings the opposite currents into focus, balance, and symmetry. So it seems. In any way, the intuition and mental forms of navigation always allow some freedom from common rules that encompass the mainstream motion in the world's mill.

In *Day and Night*, the antinomy of heaven and hell is depicted rather peacefully: the light of the heights does not recoil from the darkness of the depth. All is face-centered: *Day and Night* unite light and shade; Sun and Moon share the same root. Each day is a short version of a life; each night we are passing away to wake up in the morning like Lazarus. There are many examples of the marriage of day and night amidst the vestiges of many cultures. Watching the ever changing of day and night, we caught the furtive moment that freezes their equilibrium, void of the twilight state of uncertainty. Painters, especially the realists, whose eyes are adjusted to see only the surface, ignore the underground, which takes an equal space with the visible region of our drawing. Our landscape, including what is beneath it, is

painted on the face, which emblematic features imitate not so much blooming nature as its magic signs and patterns. The eyes are rising on the horizon; the mouth is sealed underground with silence; the nose turns into the tree trunk, which axis divides the painted scenery according to the formula “as above so below.”

Placed at the intersection of the two strata, the guiding post of the tree belongs to both of them, as if connecting the two photographic worlds – the positive and the reversed negative. The latter one is x-raying both the depth of the earth and the starry nighttime sky. Retold through the centuries in diverse forms, the idea of a meta-tree indeed has perennial roots. No one knows when and how that tree of life has been seeded. In shamanic practices (that discover so much and explain so little), the sacred world of spirits is supposedly accessible along the central axis of the great world-tree. It

Day and Night © 1991





Tree of Life ©1989, 90 1/2 x 48",
collection of The Auckland Art
Museum, NC

opens the passage between the outer world and the invisible realm of vital elementals, in other words, the channel between the day and night of consciousness, between thoughts and “underthoughts.” There is even etymological evidence of the relationship between “tree” and “light”: in German and in Old English, tree is “baum,” out of which the derivative “beam” branched out time ago. Whether it is a beam of light or a beam of wood, they share the root of the same tree.

Abstracted from the landscaped circumstances of *Day and Night*, *Tree of Life* has incarnated in our *Photoglyphs* in word form. The cryptic meaning of the work arouses from the two monograms that stand for “tree” and “life,” both distantly reminding the cross-shaped *Chi-Rho*, the renowned Greek monogram for Christ.



Even as the tree of life is usually envisioned as a feminine creative matrix, it holds some patristic elements. Precisely, in theology, particularly in the Gospel of John, the Word has a rather prominent position. So also might have His linguistic *sponsa verbi*, or bride of the Word, which conceptually has been zealously elaborated by the Gnostics behind the image of Pistis Sophia.

Similar to the rhythm of *Day and Night*, the cruciform monograms appear on the face and on the nape, where the sign literally grows into the hair, and speaking allegorically, into the vegetation of the tenebrous night and its puzzling latent activity. The leaves and roots of our anthropomorphic tree are joined in the loop of endless renewal – a trees’ annual blooming and shedding of its foliage. In that, we did not violate the conservation law of nature. The scattering hairy leafage adorns the skin-toned trunk that seems to be wrapped in a wooly substance of which kind the grand-grandmothers have handled in their spinning wheels. For the literally minded, the appearance of a thing is reality, and a tree that grows outside their window is in reality a tree because it has the precise appearance of one. Meanwhile, we treated that object as a subject, adding some elements of the

Renaissance aesthetics, the mystifying scribbles, and the fluffy hair foliage. The latter “articles” are infused not only with allusions, but also with a certain reality of nature and her rituals, and perhaps even her playfulness and uninhibited pleasure of creation. Men partake in her performance both consciously and unconsciously similar to the leaves and twigs of the large perennial, rotating in its loop of blooming and fading, which progeny of leaves fall away every season.

Although the envisioned tree is based on a visible one, its “arty” version refers not to the material substance as we know it, but to the root-matter feminized in its appearance. Naturally, it is only an outward figure for the inner meaning. The ideational meta-element of matter and its prime force are found in many traditions: it is reflected in the female images of Indian Kali-Shakti, Egyptian Isis, and her Semitic descended *Shekina* in *Sephir Sephiroth*, the cryptic kabalistic concept of Tree of Life. In the religious-philosophic expression of human thinking, the homogeneous spirit-matter connection is elaborated intricately, tracing how the subjective in man is related to the objective of the universe. There is no need to go deeper into the idea of that kind of a tree for it would bring mainly cognitive overload to this visual story. It is worth mentioning that the myriad filaments of life (whether counted as nerves, acupuncture meridians, or hairs, as in this artwork) saturate everything with unifying energy, which appearance, qualities, and quantities might be different in different ideas, but its actual essence is the same.

6: E -ART-H

Almost all branches of sacral knowledge seem to coincide in describing the process of enlightenment, twined with a somewhat eschatological experience. Whether bringing punishment or grace, it is inevitable if one wants to know more about that which is shut away from earthmen by the seven seals. No one is able to solve the riddles of live with all his learning. Whether reading ancient metaphysical or up-to-today scientific books, it may only redouble the darkness unless the heart is opened to *faith*, the mind to *knowledge*, and both to *experience*, which is radically different from the experience of most people who are traveling through life without spiritually perceiving. We are not talking about that faith with which people are praising God for giving them children, riches of life, opportunities, and means of cheating each other. Neither is the option given to that computerized knowledge with which science advances into the grisly field of genetic cloning, and certainly not to the experience of the practical man bent on earning a good living, who with his doubtful ethics and lack of spiritual inclinations is ever ready to cast the first stone. There is a big difference between things as they are and how they ought to be. However, behind the horizon that links them, that elusive ever-moving away line, some quiet mysteries are always in progress that no pragmatic man can discover – and for him, they are not worth discovering. Must one believe in what one cannot comprehend? In any religion, there is a dark corner of metaphysical vacuum; and in submerging temporarily in its substructure (as in the mind, so in the world) one may find an indescribable treasure and a balm for his ontological wounds. For an average good citizen it is sheer madness. And he is right – he would go mad if he were prematurely plunged into the abyss of the earth.

Writers love to describe various social and personal chasms and their effects for the sake of amusement or for the sheer hell of it; at all events, no harm will be done if we add our conceptual version of it. The language of generalization counteracts the toxic effects of the expedition, in which one has to go below the horizon of the normal life “canalizing”

the element of earth. Many myths say that only after a successful trip to the inferior boils of the Earth (e.g., classical Hades, the underworld of the Indian god Yama, “the realm of the mothers” of Goethe’s *Faust II*, and other kinds of limbo) one can free oneself from the deceptive influence of maya.

Immersion (Gaia)

In a sphere with the radius of 1,5 m, all internal edges are covered with a thin artificial film on which the surface of the globe is represented. The person entering the object finds himself, as it seems, in the terrestrial globe turned inside out (anthropological egocentrism reaching absurdity). Little by little, the film begins tightening upwards in the middle and breaks at a touch with the body of the person and one has the impression as if the spectator passes through the earth’s cover. Under the film that is completely removed, one discovers earth’s close-up static representation (with cobbles, remains, etc.) There appears an association with the immersion into the soil, possibly even with an internment. Gradually, the light is becoming increasingly dim and eventually it goes out. The exit from the sphere can be found only by groping.

Rimma Gerlovina

1976

In our early project-environment called *Gaia*, we stepped into that dimension conceptually and not without the cheerful stoicism of youth, depicting the whole process with a cold and somewhat dehumanizing hyperrealism. Later, coming in touch with the photographic muses, we preferred to treat that sensitive subject symbolically, presenting mainly vestiges of that murky territory by enveloping ambiguous images in black, covering all with earth, and hoping that out of it, with the right kind of luck (or rather with God’s help), some

Looking Grass may sprout one day. And so it did.

If in the male image *Be-am* the blackening of the face emphasizes the linearity of the light (the source of which is not shown), then in the female image or, better to say, androgynous *Looking Grass*, the light seems to come from within. Here we step down to one more level of density showing light in a tormenting fall into gravitating substance of matter. Far not everyone is able to go through the gloomy night with steady virtue. After the sun goes down, the moon is the only eye of the night, remaining an uncertain companion on the narrow path. Even if we treat that problem with poetic elegy, it is only in form, not in content. With no intention of any kind, indifferently, the moonlight dimly transmits and simultaneously obscures the spiritual aspect of light which “shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). Yet, preserving its origin, the light-imparting

Looking Grass © 1991



power is not lost and buried in the dark abyss of indefinite, chaotic matter. It is “eyeing” even there. That idea, or rather its mystical reflection, we tried to catch through the austere magic of the darkness of that image.

Perhaps, upon reflection, one may notice another layer of the meaning screened behind *Looking Grass*. The plant stems out of the dark as though out of soil, coming symbolically out of the limited state of matter, within which our mind and body, and everything else are conditioned. In the most general terms, the commonplace earth represents one of the limited states of matter, subjected to the fetters of fatality, meaning that oxidized matter (with O₂ in its atmosphere) in which our life begins and ends. If our soul does not live by its clock as our 12 “O²clock” body does, our wavy mind and vulnerable psyche are much more dependent on it than we think. Unless they (or rather we *in toto*) exercise discrimination and self-control, we remain chained to our own physicality entangled in all sorts of nameless fears. Eclipsing the essence that, in fact, gives life to our thought and body, mercilessly indifferent matter can fill one's psyche as it fills the cosmos all around.

Instead of dramatizing that condition to the point of metaphysical despair, *Looking Grass* suggests the visual x-ray metaphor, which, we hope, does not extend beyond the limits of sense. The talismanic eyes look like a growing point of that yet underground plant striving to bring forth a new tissue of life and self-knowledge. Wide-open and resolute, the eyes in *Looking Grass* seem to be warding off something undesirable and unintelligible in that void-like blackness, perhaps, some specter of a collective alter ego ever inclined to digest an individual soul. Down below, the current between yourself and the world is quite low. At certain moments, light does not reach us directly, only by reflection and by patches. Risking being buried alive with all his senses and nerves wide awake and alert, a determined individual would search for the remedy from this mental darkness, gradually reevaluating many of his previous thoughts and converting them into another fresh view on life, similar to a gardener who uses the compost for enriching soil.

The sprouting of vision is also depicted in the work *Seed*, where all is wrapped in subterranean dampness. In reality, everything important occurs in secret. Is it possible that –



Seed © 1995

incomprehensible and fabulous as it might be – the divine power in the human soul “exercises” itself while it takes shape and grows through the hindrances of matter like a seed through soil? United by that idea, the two images still require two different modes of explanation: if *Seed* (“see” is written under one eye and “d” under the other) suggests interior foresight, then in *Looking Grass*, both nature and human being share the same organs of vision – as within, so without. In an obscure way, *Looking Grass* projects a point-blank to the mystical center in which light is not separated from darkness. Everything is part of everything else with rules of its own: light survives in deep darkness, while darkness governs the process of illumination from within. Strikingly personal, yet strangely impersonal – that seems to be an impulse caught in the eyes planted in nowhere by the hand of fate. What is more, the darkened image of *Looking Grass* has something in

common with the Black Madonna theme, with her mournful striving for deliverance. Lost in the mist of time, the face of Black Madonna is still recognizable in any movement of nature, in any blade of grass looking at us from the dark gaps of the Earth's nursery. It shows the mourning and the sustaining virtues of the Earth, namely, its root-matter. Coming to that, we have to admit that the subject of *mater materialis* (mother of matter, "matter" comes from Latin *mater* "mother") is too complex and would need a separate treatise, so we leave it at that – born in darkness, but growing into light.

The luminosity and its fading into the void cannot be ignored at least on this side of time and space. Aren't the s-tar-s shining in a tar-like darkness of the universe? As an interaction of opposites, light and darkness practically grow into each other. On the playground of numerous universes, all appears and disappears incessantly: light turns into all light;

S-tar-s © 1990





Age of Pisces © 1989

darkness disappears in its own essence. To survive, darkness oppresses light in order to make itself visible. In any possible way, it casts a shadow on spiritual pinnacles of life, and, to replay the concept of *S-tar-s* verbatim, it tars the passage of light. The primal confusion and its bitter conflicts are much older than man. According to the Christian mystics' axiom, the abyss of God calls to the abyss in us. Turning from the black vaulting of space to its psychological equivalent (i.e., ignorance, mental darkness and, perhaps, vice), we find that in the field of mythology the same shady role of an obstacle is allotted to the serpent and others of that kind, while in everyday life it is taken care of by different individuals belonging to the congregation of the wicked. The fussy business of the world cannot but inhibit spiritual development; and as long as an aspiring individual does not allow himself to remain indolent and weak-willed, he can battle the



Ursa Major © 1990

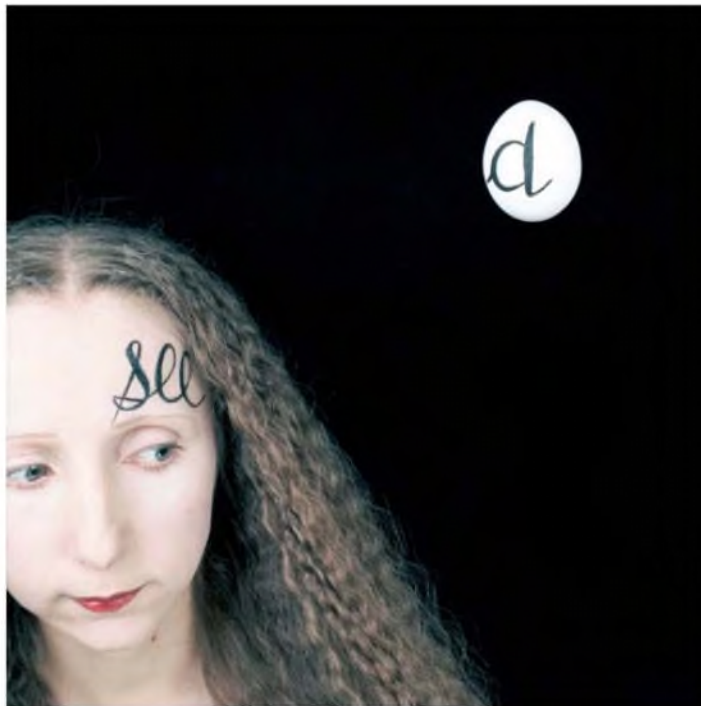
obstacles by his own efforts (and by being helped). The greater the obstacle, the greater is triumph of light making it possible to know the intelligible realities.

Dark chaos is like clouds of tar milk on which life feeds and stars emerge from the periodical sleep of the universe. Perhaps a neat astronomer, sitting at his telescope on the cornerstone of his education and prudent theoretical intellectualism, would laugh at our faces... coated with *S-tar-s* dust and adorned with the sign of *Ursa Major*. The artists' astronomy is less astronomic and might be doubted more than a hundred times, for the object and the image of it are not less distant than *Ursa Major* is distant from its sign on the sky map, the tiny segment of which we "humanized" in that work not without a meaning. Imagine that you go into the space of your mind and see countless worlds; each plane can be seen as a different band of frequencies, to which, although

dormant, your psychic senses could respond. However inappropriate the “monocle” of the *Big Dipper* might look on the female face, it foretells another radius of experience, as solitary people frequently have. Even so, their data is to some degree relevant and their little vision of truth remains perfectly incommunicable, the starlight makes their life lighter for them. Our spiritual stability depends on our connection to our stellar source. (We hope this unorthodox astronomical remark is palatable.)

The best of the human species tend to see life with two eyes: the one is of starry origin and the other has the terrene orientation. In the end, the mental vision might *See-d* another universal vision – so it is worded in the image with that title. When circumstances combine to hasten it, speaking symbolically, *See-d* has a vegetative beginning that evolves into another linguistic venture, ending in something essentially

See-d © 1992



new, which in that picture is represented by the “*d*-egg” floating autonomously in the dark space. We leave it to the viewer to decide whether the human mind lays eggs in space or fetches them down from the universal sources – both interpretations seem to be valid. One thing has to be added here: matter and spirit stand as two factors of unknowable unity. Moreover, if matter is materialized mind stuff, it exists in relation to our mind. Whatever we see and touch we do it through our minds: our organs of vision and fingers are only the receptacles of the data. Matter per se might not exist, at least not in the state we happen to perceive it – for beneath the slight rippling wave of creation is the changeless ocean of spirit. Some individuals happen to catch a glimpse of it, now and then. Not always being able to distinguish between sound and unsound reasoning, we connect all these matters through our visual concepts.

Terra © 1989



There is another exceedingly considerable aspect of our existence in both matter and its existence in our mind that involves an irresoluble element of suffering. Everybody perceives its darkness differently; some express it by directly painting all black, while another might poeticize it with a written mannerism, say, envisioning how primordial mud wafts the scent of decay and generation, and so on. The point is that the dark aspect is not less active under the bright daylight than it is in obscurity. Take for example, the barefoot image *Terra*, glowing with the red color. To err is human on *terra nostra*, especially when one is run to that *terra* like a fox. Sometimes people err in unison, as they often laugh and cry. *T-err-a*, that simple five-letter word (with three of the letters in ambush) speaks of our destiny with incisive eloquence and, to a certain degree, is physical – with both feet on the ground and down to earth.

Facade © 1990



To convey this message with the utmost economy, we employed the following method: instead of putting important words into complex sentences, we synchronized them with the expression of the face, and, as it is in the case of *T-err-a*, with the footsteps over the head-globe. Where do they lead? Winding through a constant conjunction of events, speaking of a destiny, they are unpredictable in their karmic effects, sometimes of esoteric proportions. Moreover, earth “contains” all our missteps in its own substance. At the end, the property of matter is fatal for us, nearly but not entirely, but neither the authors nor their readers can be assumed to have experienced that in life. Not yet – anyone reading this is not dead yet. One thing is certain though: it is impossible that the spiritual substance should become a corpse. If we were to reduce all our wearisome feelings on that account to a single word, we can think of no other word but *Mattter*. In the midst

Mattter © 1989



of material yearnings – literally in *Mattter* – three t's (t t t)
stand as if up on Calvary Hill.

Even if the projected *sententia* is not of much felicity and
and is uncomfortably near the truth, both works *Ma-ttt-er* and

Diver © 1991,
photo, metal



T-err-a are free from turbulent expression, and are only a play of words edging on warning. No one has seen matter separated from form; some tend to enjoy it, while others who want to shake off the phenomenal world from their conscious attention have to endure it. Neither passionate delight of rebellion, nor miserable morbidity and neurosis would be helpful in the process of the liberation of an entrapped soul. Contrary to this attitude, the practical man of reason is sure that earth is given to him for living and exploitation – for all else is chimerical. He thinks that the perceptible terrestrial world comprising of the unanimated things, the blessed greenness, and the animals, is created exclusively for his practical use. Whether he is mistaken or telling his gospel truth, we would not go into it, aiming to emphasize here another very important aspect of matter: matter as substance. In a more general and certainly less parochial view on that substance, one literally “hard” fact is unavoidable – matter is the crust of things. In *Plato's Dream*, “dreamed,” however, by Voltaire, the great demiurge divided all matter between the genii so they can arrange it after their images. “Demogorgon had as his share the bit of mud that is called Earth; and, having arranged it in the manner we see today, he claimed to have made a masterpiece.”¹⁸ Let us look how that masterpiece is figuring in Valeriy's conceptual earthwork.

In the line of his concepts based on three raw materials, metal, earth, and bread, *One Square Meter of Earth* is the first and most virginal work. The transparent Plexiglas construction contains nothing but earth, as typical as it may be; in a way, it is a picture of itself. It includes all its organic and non-organic components, even peculiar patterns burrowed by earthworms, which make intricate pictures of their otherwise obscure lives. We are surrounded by myriads of infinitesimally small organisms; and all these *tutti quanti* organize the melting pot of everything including our body. In fact, each shovel of soil holds more living things than all the human beings ever born.

The strict geometrical structure of the object contrasts with its loose, chaotic, content, showing a piece of dry land or, if you wish, a hip of earth that preserves its pristine darkness and latency while being incubated in the square container. Such hyperrealism bordering on blunt abstraction unites the most direct with the most general, making a link

between the gross matter-of-fact reality and the hypothetic one. The peculiar technique is not a by-product of the bored to earth imagination, contrariwise, the boldness of the approach reveals that kind of dynamism that works internally, eliminating complexity by revealing underlying simplicity. In other words, Earth – as a homogenous substance of life in the state of rest – becomes a symbol of matter, per se. Earth is the foundation and the basis of all undertaking in nature – it is the *terra nostra* for the entire life here, life that extends in space and persists through time. And out of that extension the artist separated and conserved *One Square Meter of Earth* as its emblematic standard or the model for its definition.

V. G., *One Square Meter of Earth*, 1975, soil, Plexiglas,
39 1/2 x 39 1/2 x 4"



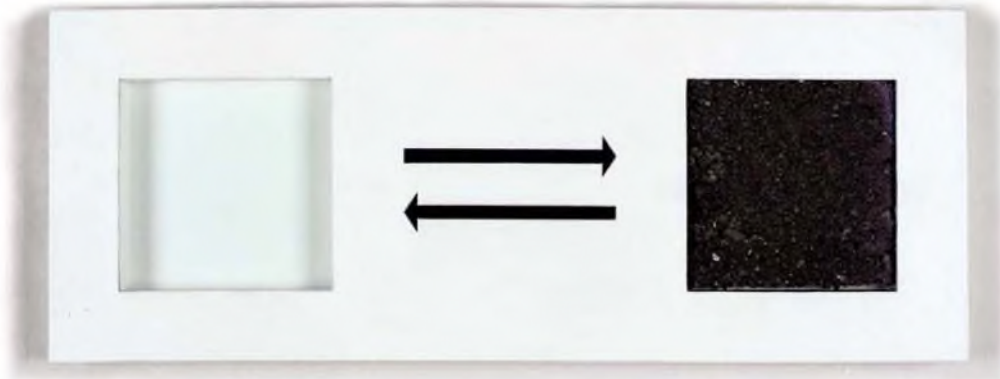
Made in the form of a herbarium or perhaps a “terrarium” for the erector set pieces, the relief titled *Merging: Earth – Metal* represents the equation between these two, meaning that everything man made sooner or later becomes ground zero; any grandiose construction eventually is leveled to the ground and becomes the property of earth. In the process of its own mutation, the Earth “breathes” in and out all its impermanent forms: whatever is built is doomed to be buried.

From here, the next equation might be deduced: earth is equal to earth as it is depicted in the object *Earth – Earth*, which suggests that philosophic matter, symbolized by earth, is self-equal. What exists alone exists. The matrix, in which our life is imbedded, is equally creative and destructive. It has self-fertilizing content, when nature under the sway of necessity is changing everything without changing its substance. In such context, matter (or earth as its symbol) might be abstracted even more as it is shown in the relief *Emptiness – Earth*, in which its presence is equated to its absence.

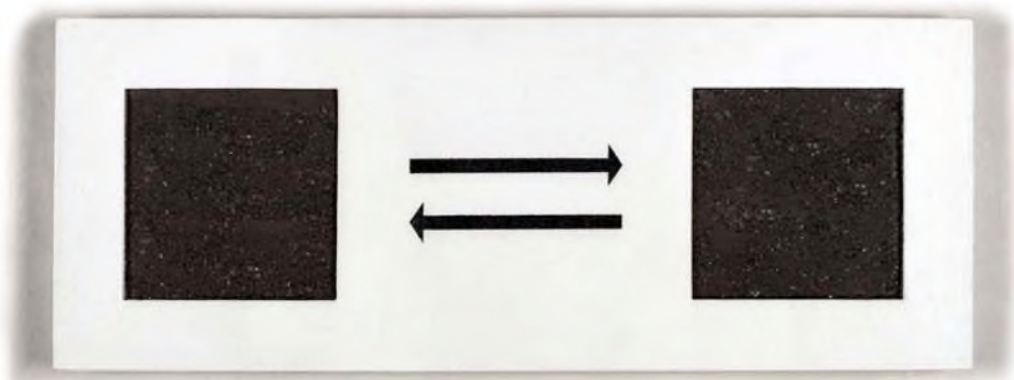
Emptiness fills out the space with its geographical vacuum. As said in *Tao Te Ching*: “Vessels are made of clay.

V.G., *Merging: Earth – Metal*.
1975, soil, masonite, glass,
enamel, metal erector set,
10 x 25 1/2 x 1 1/2”





V.G., *Emptiness – Earth* and
Earth – Earth, 1975, soil, mas-
 onite, glass, enamel, each work
 10 x 25 1/2 x 1 1/2"



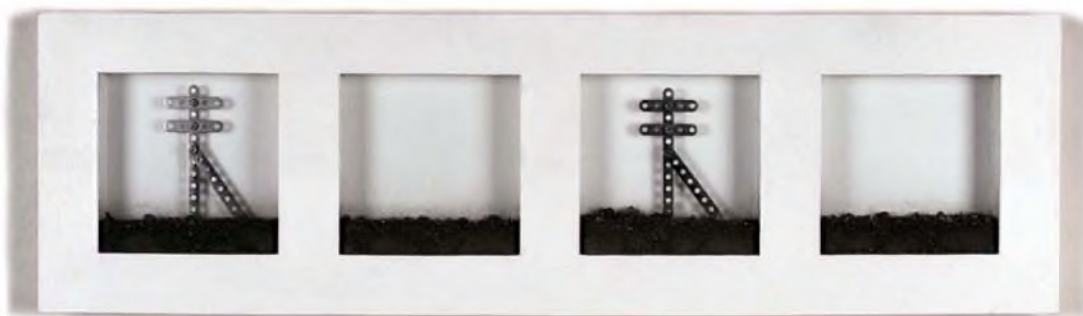
Yet their usefulness depends on the empty space inside them.” (11) From one point of view that visual formula hints on an illusory permanence in life, appearance versus reality, while from another, it pertains to the philosophic meaning of emptiness (as *sunyata* in Buddhism.) Emptiness in its fullness opens another dimension of reality that exists without

existence, being something and nothing simultaneously. Back to back, reality and illusion compose that *sunyata* or cosmic emptiness. The white color is equally significant for that series: it is a color without coloring, which blending with the white walls seems to continue the saga of the vast impersonal. Emptiness is full of real sense; it works by its non-doing. For most people, the meaning of emptiness is inconceivable as opposed to the hectic fullness of life. Yet, it seems that genuine fullness cannot be full unless it include emptiness as well.

The similar concept is presented in the relief *Oscillation*, which glass sections are arranged like a three-dimensional diagram of pulsating earth, depicting analytical process how the half-full turns into fullness, which changes into the half-emptiness to become empty, thus initiating the new cycle of oscillations. Two mutually exclusive states, the fullness and the emptiness, the visible and invisible reality, find their equilibrium in that work. The earth is shown as a physical substance and at the same time as a vacillating wave, i.e., in its actual and potential states simultaneously, somewhat similar to quantum photons that exhibit properties of both particles and waves.

The related idea is presented in the object *The View from the Train*, in the glass windows of which we see two metal guideposts standing along an invisible road. By them both frozen dynamism of nature and its rhythmic slumber are “measured.” The illusive static train is crossing some kind of an uneventful landscape, strictly conceptual, if not metaphysical. That detached non-personal ride leads not into the world, but along it – it is a mere drive of force across the field of life. There is in truth no performer but only witnessing intelligence, some kind of sitting akin to the Taoists meditations in immobile calm in the world of perpetual mobility – its train is just passing by.

The same idea might be expressed in a variety of ways: insensibly, sensually, or without much feeling involved but in a sensible way. Perhaps, the latter approach would be the most agreeable with this earth-oriented artwork. Lack of sentimentality does not preclude visual sensation received from the objects; they are a work of art fully original and yet strangely impersonal. Presented in conceptual forms as artistic formulas, the laws of the element of earth are demon-



V. G., *The View from the Train*,
1975, soil, steel, masonite, glass,
enamel, metal erector set, 10 x
33 1/2 x 1 1/2"

strated on the language of land art. There is a certain "magic" in proportions, hidden behind these relatively simple glass cases. In their strict geometrical compositions made with numerical exactness, the whiteness and emptiness contrast with the blackness and heaviness of earth, which maximum potential is demonstrated with the minimum of forms and colors.

V.G., *Oscillation*, 1975, soil,
masonite, glass, enamel, 10 x
41 1/4 x 1 1/2"



In his next “chamber” land art project, namely *Globe*, earth literally coincides with the Earth. It receives the solid round body of the globe representing a familiar object of the solar system. There is something of geodesy and astronomy in that by-product of a “scientific” imagination. The glass spheroid filled with soil can be rotated, showing not only the infinitesimal micro in its content, but also hinting to a far-reaching macro in its planetary connotation. The horizon of earth can be very deep; it can reach the sphere of mythology, alchemy, and even some spiritual categories of our consciousness. Each of them seems to represent the foundation on which a theory and action rest, and in that sense, gravity is one of its basic laws. The steady series of associations concerning the “embodiment” of earth can be moved into other categories. For instance, rearranging the Greek prefix “geo-“ into “ego,” we switch our attention from the landward direc-

V. G., *Globe*, 1975, soil,
glass, plastic, metal, diam.
9”, stand 5”



tion to the personal aspect. Moreover, both aspects may coexist in peace since life can be as geocentric as egocentric.

In regards of corporeal world that is all around in a continual state of flowing, it seems natural to come out with an



Map © 1992, photo, metal

idea of an anthropomorphic map. Most humanly, it reflects the vivific principle of nature, which permeates all forms of life, being readily available in vegetable dream and in mineral sleep of all geological strata. Obviously, our map is not subjected to the limitations of geographical rules; it not only shows the conceptual landscaping of Earth, but also what is more important, the earthling – just two of them, male and female. With this, the ground between the relationship

between Earth and its inhabitants is shifted, especially proportionally; instead, their new kinship is established. The imagined space around and within the body hypothetically obtains its own geometry and its own earth measuring, which has an occult potentiality of human earth. Between the astronomical body of Earth and a tellurian body of man, there is a wild gulf; nevertheless, they are a symbolic copy or repetition of each other. In such perspective, we can talk about a poetical parallel between them, but maybe it is not solely poetical. The formidable energy is stored in heavy stones and in our bony substance; bloody arteries, veins, and capillaries flow as rivers in our bodies – the fluids that circulate around the body of Earth and in our own body seem to be blood-related. Each of us has our own peak experience – our Mount Everest, while our Dead Sea lies in the lowest point of our depression. Hair patches of vegetation and the incalculable bacterial population are our flora and fauna. In each destiny, there is at least a square of the scorched earth.

Clearly, the sapient body of a man depends on the celestial body of the Earth, yet our souls have a life of their own that they cannot share with anyone else, the more so with their setting. That situation might be conceptualized as briefly as this: the Earth is born in space; the man is born on the Earth, but not of it. (Golem-race excluding.) The soul puts on the body the way a person puts on clothes. The Earth in the Vedas is also the symbol of our own flesh – being children of heaven, we are by the body of the earth. Neither Mother Earth nor Mother Nature is our real mother; at best, they are our stepmothers, if one insists on finding the relatives.

The land is nowhere when your own essence is your home. Guarded by fate that maps our circumstances, the body is born to serve the soul. In a way, it is only the surface of the soul. However carefully we polish it, the surface remains only a coating and an outward superstratum. Especially the earthly-minded are heavily attached to the stream of life and impulses of obscure forces of earth. From earth comes that sense of materiality, which is formed by the body and its fear of dissolution. Indeed, there is no gap in nature, just as water closes behind the moving ship immediately, earth covers and buries all fading impulses of life. The blood vessels of nature become clogged, rivers dry, and our day of life turns into a night of death. At some point, Earth will be as old and

exhausted as any old organism before its dissolution. In the same manner, man's body is formed of the dust of the ground on which he stands. Here we let Voltaire continue to philosophize on that subject, relieving this paragraph with his witticisms passing through the head of his personage Zadig: "Our Earth which is in fact only an imperceptible point in nature, appears to our cupidity as something so great and noble. Zadig then visualized men as they really are, insects devouring one another on a little atom of mud."¹⁹

Regarding atoms of mud, in the most general terms, all matter is composed of them; and, in the ultimate analysis, they are not exactly mud, but vortices of energy that have no substance at all. What is matter then? Does it appear to be

Earthbound Book © 1997



solid because our sense perceptions of touch and sight tell us so? It sounds like bumping into chairs that are not there. Again, we are passing through the concept of maya, trying to understand whether this mysterious maya is emptying the material world off, relieving it from the unreality of matter or, on the contrary, magically filling the material world with unreal matter. What isn't there, isn't there, yet nonetheless it is. Certainly, that way of thinking may produce a mental vertigo in our brains; because we have material form, we are all forced to undergo what we think are real changes of form even if we take it for maya. The sense of space gives us the feeling of all earthly beauty and at the same time makes us historical witnesses to how all these beautiful works return to dust and the earth.

To route the earthbound perception towards a better end, while changing the subject to some extent, we will return to our linguistic strategy and introduce the most remarkable magic word square. First, it was found on the wall during excavation at Pompeii and later in many other places in Europe, where it was usually carved on stone tables.

S	A	T	O	R
A	R	E	P	O
T	E	N	E	T
O	P	E	R	A
R	O	T	A	S

Roughly translated from Latin, “the sower Arepo guides the wheel with care,” it is not only an acrostic square, in which each first letter in each line spells a word, but also a four-times palindrome either readable from back or forth. The central symmetrical palindrome “tenet” is equal to itself (like the word “level”) and makes the form of a cross in the middle of the square. Appealing to the emotions as well as the mind, the *Sator Square* was called “the key to the great Arcanum.” Let us look at it closely: the sower guides (or “tenets,” to anglicize the noun into the verb) the wheel (“rota”), the cross, and the square. To put it another way, he set in motion the square formations of life, meaning the whole opus magnum. The plural of “opus” is “opera,” which reads backwards “Arepo,” the name of the sower (*sator*) or the savior. Created during the time when the early Christians



Betwixt © 1998

were being persecuted, the palindrome had an obvious connection with the sacral symbolism, and perhaps with Ezekiel's wheels and soteriology, the doctrine of salvation ("soter" is "savior" in Greek). As it was suggested, this magic square was probably not intended only as an Arcanum, but also as a password and a healing charm. People always resorted to symbolic words and images in order to speak of their innermost things, often turning to art, visual or verbal, which was ever useful in entertaining their aspirations.

Many things might happen, when you let yourself go with art. In fact, life as art (art as life) might be a genuine *modus vivendi* if the way of living in the imagination and in reality is in the alchemical agreement. (Sometimes, it seemed

to be our way of getting along together.) Art, at its best, does not constitute proofs of ideas; it acts out proofs, which in the succession of transformation might change their visual skin while preserving their essential message. In our art, the most drastic example of that type of stoicism appeared in the two sibling works sharing the seemingly unexpressive title *Art*.



Art © 1989, photo, metal

One is the rotating three-dimensional poem; the other is the compiled kaleidoscopic photograph. Their mutual concept is summarized in the sentence: *earth* parts, martyr carts, in which all is permeated by art: not only the earth in its fertility, but also the consciousness of the advanced individual, whose life is marked with separation and suffering necessitating fortitude and endurance, whom in one word, strong as it were, we can call a “martyr.”



R. G., *Art*, 1988, wood, acrylic, 13x13 x 2". Rotating the upper circle with the word "art," one can get the following sentence: earth parts, martyr carts.



Art is a password. It concerns creativity in a much wider aspect than in its traditional connotation: here art is equal to "being," meaning that the two routes of creating and living are not divided, as in the archaic phrase "thou art this." It is not a mere play of the inflections, a conspicuous abbreviation, or, heaven forbid, the language of hurry with its

snappish words and broken sentences that we hear all around now. The full meaning of our halfway language is unified with the visual expression, its *obligato* accompaniment. Together they talk about the active artfull force lying hidden within life like the hard kernel within its brittle husk. As any amalgam of art and mysticism, that fusion tends to have the connection with the archetypal current, consider Solomon's *Song of Songs*: "Thou *art* all fair" (Sol. 4:7).

The further meaning of these works pertains to the process of mastering the worldliness in yourself. The earth is the place appropriate mainly for the baser transaction of life; it is a container of all things sensible, barely the ideal. When spiritual values are compromised daily for wealth, power, sex, and other forms of self-gratification, each individual who sincerely preserves his ethics and faith, has an exceptional gift or other noble qualities, can be turned into a kind of martyr. Let us picture that situation in the field of the free arts – still a good pasture for the individuals seeking all kinds of freedom. The first to come to mind are so-called professional artists that, as anybody else, are not immune to the profound corruption and hopeless commitment to material ends; being respectful members of the guild, they have nothing to do with the caste of wounded individuals. Martyrdom, as well as genius, is a gift of gods, not available to all. Less corrupted (artists of a type) who usually overvalue themselves superstitiously, always suffer for that very cause, but it is not what we mean in our works. Such martyrdom is merely an urge to complain, especially when one's ego does not get what it wants, finding a sense of relief in self-flagellation.

As for the rest, the very little rest, art is the way and the vehicle for progress into the world of imagination and from thence, the world of spirit. Every single step is a matter of personal refinement, in which context all social arrangements would simply represent a mechanical mill, and, as expected, such attitude backfires. Any fellow not fit for the current cultural milieu is usually mistreated under the wicked mask of indifference, unworthiness, or perverse criticism. In time, the "underprivileged" individuals find themselves in isolation, perhaps in solitude, carrying on their transmitting task with difficulties. The solace is that there are some redeeming features in any situation, so it is in that case – hindrance is the



The Last Supper © 1991

will's best friend. Words like "successful" or "unsuccessful" imply things that artists (and everybody else) do and do not want to have happen to them, but they might be wrong either in wanting or not wanting them.

CORRECT
ERROR

Let us look at the same picture from another angle: true creativity demands certain amount of solitude and isolation, which allows one to be with oneself. Here we mean creativity in its most abstract sense, including its dynamic form that creates and its static form that receives; in fact, that would imply a *daily art of living* for everybody who lives creatively. With the mind turned away from gross material interests and worldly ambitions, it is possible to reverse the normal direction of sense perception from the external to the internal,

bringing outer and inner dormant psychic forces into being. Then, if a daring individual does not fear his own solitude, the evoked psychic forces can lead him through purification, study, and practice to sensory control and refinement, while raising his level of perception, moral qualities, and understanding to a higher degree. And what about his service to humanity? What's the use of his solitude and his, so to speak, enlarged vision received in a whispering peace? Once you are aware of the "mechanism" of your spiritual progress, it is only a matter of practice as to what degree of withdrawal and control you need to achieve. Besides, it is important to understand that ethics, noble qualities, and higher aspirations are invisible to those who have none, therefore the leveling down

Robe © 2001



at a wrong time and in an improper place would not improve the situation: that type of self-sacrifice is usually unappreciated if not added to one's other condemned defects.

Any unique type of individuality – different from others in many ways and therefore inevitably isolated – has one's better hours of clarity and creativity not in the collective atmosphere, but in being alone. For that reason, he is ever disposed against the surplus of the requirements of social intercourse with the world. If that inclination grows into a kind of natural instinct, something always will be subtracted from the gratifications in life. Instead, another kind of a gratification might be expected. Emancipated from the prevailing opinions on just about everything, such a person involun-

Triangle © 2001



tarily functions as a little world unto himself, which is in his proper element (not in his ego, which, in fact, is a detrimental opposite to that elevated state). What can one expect of it? It has been said that if you are the right caliber, you will succeed in your progress whoever you are. This may take time, but its value far outweighs the effort. The world, with all its riches and its triumph in the industrialization of senses, is not able to rob such an individual from his spirit, or to be more accurate with the notions, not his spirit, but rather his vulnerable connection with the Spirit.

Super-personal and timeless, it pervades all that exists; that what is expressed in the age-old Eastern concept of unity – *Tat twam asi* – rendered from the Sanskrit as “Thou art this.” The short sentence “earth parts, martyr carts” makes the similar point. The words are different, but their meaning is “art-rooted” in the old idea of the all-pervading spirit. Its track is hard to find in the midst of the life we lead. Moreover, instead of searching for it, most people tend to shrink from it with the instinct of natural men, no matter what they say and how much and to whom they pray. The life-giving stream goes through our subconscious mind where a whole dustbin full of repressed urges and thoughts are saved from the time of that vital animal instinct by which man has survived his fight through the evolutionary jungle. With that force in control, man can become no more than a spiritual beast, so to speak, particularly when personal incompleteness becomes completed by the collective weaknesses of the social order. Our civilization, abnormally stimulated by possessive accumulative instincts, is just another technologically advanced form of the same biological struggle; and if you do not want to play its game, reap your sorrows. It will go as it had always gone. That is why “earth parts, martyr carts” is put on a loop in both works, each having the circular compositions. We can savor or dislike the aftertaste of the acute words in which too many “arts” lock the eye within the same pattern, fixing the attention on the same fundamental prejudice today that our ancestors have shown throughout man’s history – causing harm to those whom they are not able to understand. The world stage where natural people play natural parts is ever busy; it is like roulette. However sad or critical it sounds, one must allow everyone the right to exist in accordance with one’s nature, or rather, in accordance to what nature allowed our



Bleeding Heart © 1998

fellow creatures to be.

The mystery of enduring personages representing mental light against mental darkness in their secret navigation in the world is part of spiritual reality. Their generous view of the ordinary lets them perceive something pulsating and alive beneath the hard surface of material forms and cheer them up during difficulties in some obscure but wonderful way. With a sense of fearlessness and “unlostness,” they seem to carry a clear space around them that makes all things plain and acceptable. As to others, all good-natured people, both high-thinking and simple-living types, recognize that contagious energy that vitalize the world we live in. There you are, you would think: life goes on.

7: ANIMA-L

Each separate image represents a detailed sketch for one large “painting” or rather a visual saga, testifying that dividing reality into parts is arbitrary. The work *Anima-l* is an example of chemical blending without bonding so that each “ingredient” retains its own properly and make-up. A general libido drive manifests itself as basic habits that fortunately for animals and unfortunately for humans coincide in a great deal. This pattern seems to be coded in nature much deeper than in our thinking mind. *Quo animo?* – With what intention? (Lat.)

With his little addition of one letter “L”, cat Misha changed the whole picture, extending human anima below into the animal kingdom. Indeed, animals are extensions of human souls; their codes are concealed within our DNA as their tails are hidden in our tailbones. The references in any folklore to the close relationships between the anima and the animal kingdom are innumerable. They are rich with phantasmagorias, but by no means short of attested stories. In the shamanic tradition and not only there, a phenomenon exists known as the “power animal.” These guardian spirits guide human souls through scenes of unconsciousness and funerary landscapes that are not necessary to understand verbatim. Every shaman must have an animal-master that assists him in his wonderworking task, even if it is invisible and appears only at seances. Various animals stood on the crossroads of different mythologies and eschatological doctrines. Goddess Bastet was not alone to have a feline appearance; the atemporal realm of the Egyptian pyramids was populated with many gods bearing different animal heads thus indicating the principle forces of nature. Presented mythologically, irrational phenomena were tolerated in a rational world in which internal powers wore external masks of different animals and, as such, fit to familiar life forms.

Animals indeed carry our childhood within themselves; they never grow up as children do; our pets remain the same, open and innocent as babies. Both children and animals know how to play, learning it without being taught. Games are an *a priori* part of human nature reflected in child behavior and in



Anima-I © 1989

art; games make us liable to creativity, stimulating and reflecting it. Nature rules her kingdom through a play of illusions allowing us to avoid her dark side using a similar magical portal. Children play life.

An animal's anima bears many vestiges to our own physiology and anatomy; therefore, many common features are traceable in each other's characters, from the greatest to the least, including the "cannibalistic" habit to feed on fellow creatures. Evidently, one does not require other eyes to recognize bestial elements in human behavior, especially if they prevail over human intelligence. As is the way of the world, its collective affairs are especially dangerous. In Voltaire's joke about the senate of Rome regarding "the people as a ferocious animal that had better be let loose upon the neighbors than kept at home to devour its master,"²⁰ there seems to be an ironical clue to brutality of both soon to come events –

the French revolution and Napoleonic wars. In a state of nature, every basic human that acts like an animal thinks everybody else is like him: seeking the world only for himself. In their unrepressed impulses, animals, indeed, are our mirrors, our symbolic shadows. How often, enjoying our pet's unconditional attachment to us, do we laugh at his equally unconditional possessiveness, reminding us of certain human types? Some of man's characteristics can be depicted and even explained with the brutish images of a human zoo populated with treacherous snakes, sly and mischievous monkeys, timid rabbits, or senselessly imitative parrots. People might have foxy, wolfish, or leonine disposi-

Holding a Lion © 2004



tions, to name a few. We are happy to say that Misha was an animal that has not disguised himself in human skin, as many others do.

In this connection, we wonder what is created first: the basic animal element or the human spirit? What serves as a foreground for the other? How and why are they assembled together and vary in proportion from man to man? Aside from various theories that aim at subordinating spirit to matter (or vice versa), the pendulum between two propositions “man is like an ape” and “an ape is like man” is always shifting. Truly, man can act as an ape, but an ape can only partially imitate a man. In such imitation, an animal shows its

Little Lamb © 2003



noble qualities. Whatever an animal does, its acts are genuine within the possibilities given to it by nature. The judgment of a man, acting as an ape, is another story. Such people operate on that part of their nature of which they have least reason to be proud, and yet they are. In the end, man, with a keen animal instinct, lives and acts in a “somnambular” mentality; and if you suggest that he wake up, he might bite you. Therefore, one must not be surprised to come across an idea in the annals of the esoteric teachings that might be abridged in the following proportion:

$$\frac{\text{regenerated man}}{\text{natural man}} = \frac{\text{natural man}}{\text{animal}}$$

The regenerated man is as different from the natural man, as the latter one differs from an animal. It does not merit much attention to talk down about animal-like humans; meanwhile, human-like animals deserve some credit.

Lyrical Digression in His Domestic Affairs

Undeniably, Misha knew how to play. He articulated his gift so clearly: surrendering to impulses, he played throughout his life as children do. Morning, noon, and eve, excepting his dormant periods, he displayed this capacity until his old age; meanwhile, not all men retain this quality after they grow up. Similarly to the white rabbit that provoked Alice to follow him into the rabbit hole, our Siamese cat provoked us to join his cat’s cradle, threaded between the matter-of-fact world and the otherness. Our tribute to his animal wits is not a discussion of the innate releasing mechanisms or factors triggering animal responses, but rather a moving-picture story, the vivid reminiscence of the most wonderful experience of his both nonhuman and superhuman features.

He seemed to have mastered the trick of making others laugh and, indeed, often, we could laugh away our troubles watching his smart pranks. Growing up in the atmosphere of Baroque music, he could not stand the sound of a staple gun. He knew before we even took the stapler what was in our minds and he would start to yell. Once, communicating from



Misha three months
old © 1988

different rooms, we had to raise our voices. Misha was sitting on Rimma's lap and, irritated with our lack of manners, he admonishingly patted her mouth with his soft paw. Yet, we would soon find out that his own manners and social standards were rather shaky: any chance of meeting a mouse, cricket or any other type of life of a worthy size – he had to grab that chance together with its “representative.” Any human with such a disposition would have an unlimited respect for money. Misha was utterly free from that human atavism.

At times, it seemed we could hear him speak between clenched teeth, “Enough of your kisses. Feed your cat,” or “Cats are just cats, while I am a Siamese angel;” or he would give us other information regarding our shortcomings, “They

are much too smooth. They definitely suffer from a fur shortage.” He talked through his body language that we could hear with our instinctual ears, perhaps, the same ears that help animals as creatures of circumstance follow the laws of necessity. Naturally, Misha also had some atavistic weaknesses, say, scratching his belly with his back foot. When his nasty habit of chewing our shoelaces had spread out onto the electrical wiring, we had to seek a canine remedy against it. The *lupus* in him had to be placated and tamed, not conquered by physical force.

We bought this lovely creature at a store specializing only on the Siamese breed. Our choice from that lively “brotherhood” was determined by several factors that never failed us. The first one was the most indicative – his own brothers were licking him while he was leisurely positioned as their superior in the middle. He did not utter a word of complaint when we took him in hand; moreover, he was immensely pleased when the motherly breeder began trimming his claws, which came as a surprise even to her. So she packed him in a cardboard box and gave him a rabbit paw for luck and for play. A couple of months later, a French dealer, who happened to visit us, kept staring at a chunk of fur on the floor, looking rather puzzled. What was a thing that looks like the ripped off leg of a poor animal doing on the floor of these two vegetarians? After this incident, we began to hide away all suspicious objects that our cat liked to fetch like a dog. And here lies his mystery. From his infancy, he astonished us with his obsessive fetching of everything worthy to fetch, including his own leash, on which we used to walk him in a not-too-safe garden in New York. Who could possibly have taught him fetching? It was so striking that we were tempted to embrace the doctrine of metempsychosis, imagining that one of Pavlov’s dogs reincarnated in our cat.

Incidentally, the very first day we brought Misha home we gave him the middle name, Anubis, because of his unusually long legs and graceful silhouette. This Egyptian deity with the head of a dog was not only a conductor of souls but also the holder of the scales of justice in the underworld. It was he who would sniff each newcomer with his critical nose, as did our own pet. Misha seemed to be both an offspring of the feline Bastet and the canine Anubis, and as such, he had many guiding features. In that connection, it would be

worthy to give the ancient issue a fresh slant. The veneration of the cat, the living symbol of the moon goddess Bastet that ruled life's protective forces, was so great in Egypt that anyone who killed a cat was severely prosecuted, often beaten to death. This radical way to impose animal rights was not less radically reversed in medieval Europe, when cats were partly exterminated in a witch-hunt. This brutality had its resonance during the plagues often spread by rodents, whose birth control was in cats' paws. To bring the matter to the conceptual density, we would add regrettably – any cruelty begets only cruelty.

V. G., *Birthday Sculpture*, 2000,
aluminum, photo, 6 x 2 1/2 x 4"



Misha was not only gracefully handsome and a very loving creature, he was “a man” of dignified military bearing. His extra long back claws were like spurs. When we heard their clicking on the floor, we always knew that he was coming. His upper canine teeth were prominently set in his slightly



Family Arms © 1992,
photo, metal

smiling mouth as in the jaws of a saber-toothed tiger. All *Felidae* family of lions, leopards, and jaguars could be easily traces in our domesticated carnivore. Perhaps these exclusive attributes prompted his martial behavior: not once we witnessed the most unusual scenes when our little Michael (Misha is a diminished form of Michael) was guarding our yard, chasing away our neighbors' big dog. Yet, in some minor matters he was as cowardly as most people. He

received his full coat of arms when he demonstrated his “supramental” achievement when he mastered the water closet in a *homo sapiens* fashion. Who needed kitty litter in the computer era? He spared us from handling bags of kitty litter that probably would have amounted to a ton during his seventeen years of life.

It was enough to say something with a gentle pleasant voice and he would appear. All he needed to hear was our voices – and he would answer by coming. Indeed, he was a cat of thousand names. To cite some of them from his English arsenal: he was Woolman, Pocket Panther, Fleecy Baby, and Dauphin; he was Collector Choice, Pretzel, and Miscellaneous; he was Micro-Soft and Lap-Top, General Schwartzkopf and General Chernomyrdin (two black heads nominators); he was Archetippy and Bleu-Eyesy, Sinecure and Krishnamurka (Murka is the most popular cat's name in Russia;) he was Whisker Bottle, the Theater of One Actor, and Peter and the Wolf in one person.

Animals mimic their owners. Brought up as the pet of performance artists, he also behaved as such. Wrapped in some spontaneous outfit made of our scarves or socks, he used to petrify as a statue, purring and expecting applause and admiration from his audience. He was enraptured. Immediately after the performance, he demanded catnip as a reward. Sometimes, he asked for an advanced payment. He loved to be the center of attention. As soon as he felt out of the moment, he became irritated, probably pondering on the uselessness of his feline life. Habitually in such cases, he left the room wearing a sulky expression and muttering some humanlike grumbling sounds. That was his vulnerable protest against our lack of attention to his silky personality. He was possessive, no doubt. Sometimes we did not know whether he loved us very much or simply wanted to eat us. Probably, these two attitudes were not very much separated in his animal mind.

More than once, we noticed he was thinking and then he would immediately act out his thoughts. His logic was amazing and terrifying at the same time. For example, after prolonged coughing due to drinking water too hastily, Misha deduced that water was the cause of his suffering, so he stopped drinking altogether. It was the reaction of a stoic philosopher who rejected life and found enjoyment in this rejec-

tion. The result was constipation and our prolonged struggle with his macrobiotic habit, until one day he surprised us by his licking water again, thus bringing a relief for him and for us. A load was off our minds when he stopped demonstrating his abridged ability to deal in abstract ideas.

Misha used to punish himself when he did something wrong, as, for example, turning over on the carpet. In such situations, he retired into hiding until he was ready to forgive himself. After his moral crisis passed over, he came out reenergized and enthusiastic to our mutual joy. As soon as he had a premonition of our plans to go out, he begged us childishly not to leave him alone, putting his toys near our feet or on our shoes. The first time he saw snow through the window, he gave us a questioning look with surprising “u-u-u.” Never did he utter a meow, only baby like sounds. Animals feel so much and say so little. Once Valeriy dreamed that Misha mis-

Misha © 1993



behaved somehow and when rebuked, he answered philosophically: "It just happened, that's all." That might be taken as a synthesis of his attitude towards life: simply follow his nature and there is neither virtue nor guilt. We notice that some human minds function similarly. They are just a connection of habits, a string of instincts, demanding no less than in animal behavior and probably having the same causes. In

V.G., *The Hunting Pronouncement of*
June 88: "Misha-Le in time of his customary hunting for Bura-Le (Rimma)."
The boss of Bura-Le



both cases, instinct provides the motive for an action, but in a case of human, it does not determine the action itself, which many of us take as a free will. Talking about free will, it is hard to resist quoting Schopenhauer: "We know that man is in general superior to all other animals, and this is also the case in his capacity for being trained... For as in the case of animals, so in that of men, training is successful only when you begin in early youth."²¹

Watching different stages of Misha's ingenuous life, we distinctly saw the changes in his character typical for a man: from early inquiring patterns to self-expressive behavior of youth and combative, almost mental, achievements in middle age, and finally, a softened, devout, almost reverent attachment to his nourishing "godlike" guardians at his later years. There is some parallel with the behavior of many elderly people. With the diminishing vital force, they replace activity with religious inclinations, often rather unconsciously; people always need something to rely on. That pattern is coded in our hearts by nature much deeper than in our intellect, trying to find an exit from the blind alleys of natural causes and effects. We felt our cat's feelings, however human or inhuman they were. And at a certain point we learned that cats do not have nine lives. They wear their lives out the same as all other creatures. His later suffering of the lethal illness spread out into our bones, especially during his last days when he was still purring as soon as we touched him or simply talked to him. He was accepting the inevitable in the right spirit. So we thought. In the course of his short life, his attachment, friendliness, and graceful moods were habitually demonstrated by his almost perpetual purring. And this marvelous pattern did not fail him until the last moment.

In the evolution of many levels of attainment, everybody stumbles on the repressed impulses. Often our pets, our grateful companions in the narrow path, help us in clearing some trouble spots of the personal psyche. We are inclined to think that Misha was a black and white "cat-alyt" in the alchemical process of Albedo. Through the generic mode of acting that man shares with animals, he slowly realizes the individual mode of thinking. Do we owe our debts to the animal world? And if so, it may be returned through our assisting fauna and flora in their difficult lot of natural selection in the struggle for life, especially in view that man



Nature © 1990

himself is not too far from this struggle. Human anima is a guardian spirit over the animal world in a much larger proportion than the other way around. And not only this. Human nature is continuous within the rest of nature. Some people are highly sensitive to the world around them to an almost insane degree. When Friedrich Nietzsche saw how a driver abused his cab-horse in a Turin street, he suddenly flung his arms around the neck of a maltreated animal and collapsed in tears. We carry everybody's pain upon ourselves, but only the most sensitive people know it. In a way, our nature and Nature's nature are the same nature. One thing leads to another. Perhaps, Blaise Pascal created an empirical formula saying in the *Pensées*: "It is dangerous to tell people of their bestial origin unless at the same time you tell them of their divine potential."

8: BE-LIE-VE

In *Photoglyphs*, we tried to express our ideas with the minimum use of words, giving each image a chance to speak on its own. Due to their peculiar system of notation, they seem to live independently, preserving freshness and intensity through their visual form and subliminal context. In any way, that is how our minds work, frequently trespassing into poetry. But no swift-edged thought can exist by itself; it needs synchronization. Therefore, the approach to the word as a living entity requires some imagination – as from a writer, so from a reader. However sublime the word (or logos) is, people experience it in the here and now in a variety of forms not confined to verbal interpretations. What happens in our case is that we “reface” and recharge these forms with human expressions, while other artists use other media. If each concept contains plurality within itself, the word “believe” would be a vivid morphological illustration of that notion.

With calm objectivity, the image *Be-lie-ve* encapsulates both a mode of thinking and a set of beliefs in its paradoxical duality. As if a watchword and a countersign in one mold, it lets one pass into another layer of reasoning. Written on skin that is used as a human parchment, the message obtains some vivifying quality, bringing the matter into the true forefront of consciousness or, at least, near its apparent horizon. When word becomes flesh, it’s possible to treat or mistreat it as such. In the *Acts of John*, one of the early apocrypha, there’s a poetic passage about the torment of the Word, the piercing of the Word, the blood of the Word, the passion of the Word (97:102). In that manner, we literally dissected the word “be-lie-ve” on the forehead with the help of the locks. By demonstrating the treason of falsity, the word was forced to reveal its contradictory core, being almost doomed by the interpolated magical spell of “lie.” Should we be-lie-ve in its central component or pursue another manner of seeing?

In whatever context, be it politics, religion, or art, the hypnotic hypocrisy is forever concealed in that binary. What immediately comes to mind, as its most vivid illustration, is the unworthiness of any “be-lie-ve” advertisements – their



Be-lie-ve © 1990

name is legion. It blatantly rules the world of consumers who are consumed by a wild emporium of every novelty. The lie can come masked as a friend on a personal level, or captivate with false piety or pop-wisdom suited for a crowd of blind-folded followers. In the dominion of sensual reason where faith is often blind, it is rather a regular practice to serve the lie under its roof. Some can speak deceptively with a voice that is so natural and innocent that all truth and falsity become problematical – not only fallacy, but also goodness is put in doubt. Subliminal suggestions are much harder to recognize; they invade smoothly and friendlily, nice and easy. In reality, deceptiveness always has selfish goals and in the long run, even small, unrecognized falsities can create noticeable damage.

The age-old controversy between the notions of truth and falsehood and their simultaneous conjunction come hand

in hand. There are many gradations within their correlation; starting from gross falsity versus obvious facts on the mundane level, they spread out to the subtler fields such as science, philosophy, or religion (the most vulnerable of them). The publicized spirituality has nothing to do with the genuine one that is inconspicuous and living inside itself. True faith is not a matter of interpretation that the mind may weave endlessly. In essence, they differ not less than “distilled spirit” differs from “spiritual distillation,” however close is their wording. A lie can come in the form of a truth, and a truth can come in the form of a lie. *Be-lie-ve* it or not. By words, we can arrive anywhere, but not necessarily at the truth. The Sufi master Mullah Nasreddin once said, “I never tell the truth.” If this is true, it contradicts his statement. But if he was lying, as he indicated, it means that he really was telling the truth.

Axis © 1990



The conformity of existence constantly puts a screen in front of the essential principles. Before man's vital and intellectual capacity for comprehension does not wilt and wither, something has to spur his thoughts and touch his inner essence. That might happen spontaneously, as a blow of *Hitten Madder* – the more matter is hidden the madder it hits. We hope it is not a too anomalous decoding of human difficulties, of which life never lacks. Must everything be harmful that looks dangerously inverted as *Hitten Madder*? There is another side of that conundrum. It may not be accidental to be suddenly awakened by a joke (or a shock, less healthier but more potent) exposing the absurdity of a situation. Things may appear instantly in a different light seen through the eyes of a simpleton, a child, or a naïve soul. Looking at the events of World War I through the eyes of an old African, Dr. Schweitzer was astonished by his clear-cut point of view on the

Hitten Madder (Hidden Matter) © 1989



civilized Europeans who killed each other merely of cruelty, and not of necessity – they didn't eat the dead. It is a simple instinctive truth with a paradoxical backbone. Indeed, we do not eat the meat of an anthropos; no doubt, it adds certain virtue to our living the imperfect life. Civilized people prefer to eat one another psychologically, mentally, and socially with a variety of deceptions and ill-natured triumph – and that is what is called the “way of the world” with its World War I and II and III and IV. All wars, says Voltaire, are a matter of robbery, but we must not be tempted to comment on this here.

In order to meet contradictions backward and forward, people employ different tactics in which an ironic (but not cynical) disposition lingering on the border of paradox appears to be a useful tool. Yet, it is not as trivial as it seems to be, for only those who have already developed their sense of humor can handle it with full safety, which has to be not less subtle and ingenious than any other creative capacity. Neither based on vernacular jokes in vogue, nor suffering from sarcasm or cynicism, the kind of witticism we favor has no intention to annoy or insult. Worse yet, one can be reproached for lack of humor while simply ignoring the joke intended to irritate or slur. There are defects in some mind tools that make them beset others with their own confusions and resentments. In such cases, often one is better off by saying nothing than speaking out. The human brain is a strong weapon, and if prompted by uncontrolled emotions, its dart easily offends people with consequences that are difficult to mend. When expressed coolly and without passion, avoiding the danger of falling into infatuation with cleverness, the intelligent mind can prove by contradiction, through its somewhat whimsical deductive power. In short, wit devoid of malice is a treasure with “mind-blowing” potential. Only an unprejudiced sense of humor, however sharp and spiky it might appear, can evolve into an abstract faculty that preserves the lightness of good humor and its alleviating sanctions for spiritual opportunities.

Time heralds the ultimate test for any joke. As the years and punch lines wear on, humor as such, as a strictly human faculty, continues to “enjoy” its frivolous position in any language. With all its ambiguity, that skill becomes more apprehensible through introspection. That prompts us to draw



Yogi © 1996

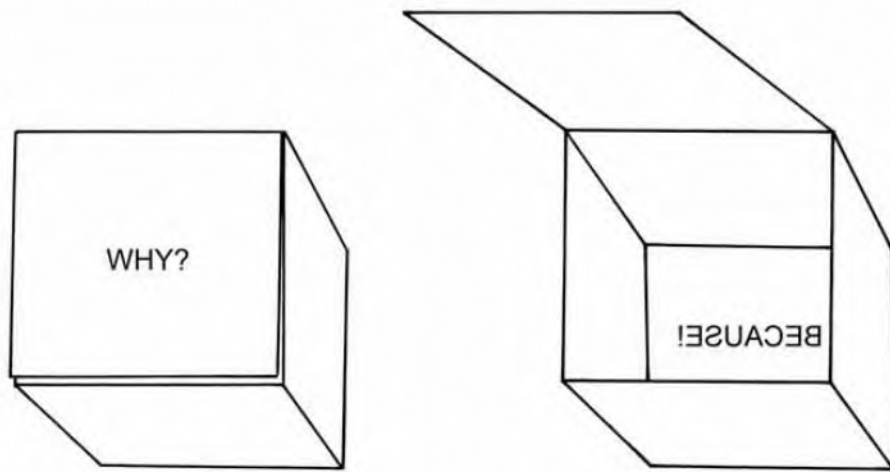
a borderline distinction between the koan-type humor, which assists transcending human finitude, and the casuistic sarcasm and sardonic irony that have a propensity to do the opposite. At its best, irony also can upset the boredom of trivialities, but usually such wit feeds on the lower tendencies of human nature that are frequently masked by sophistication. Often, people are more foolish than they think. (Reaching this remark, we can snap our fingers and think no more of it.) Yet, it is rather disquieting to witness how good and not so good humor is sinking down into cold irony, while cynicism becomes an unfortunate syndrome of our time – it

is more perilous than any superficial play on words of a shallow-opinioned intellectuality. In proportion to humanity's rise in the scale of information, we are getting more cynical. That brings us to another story showing how ideas can have the opposite effect to the intended.

There is an ironical twist in the very meaning of the word "cynic," which is supposed to be self-explanatory, deriving from the Greek word "canine," "doglike," literally snarling. With the touch of absurdity characteristic for history, as well as everything else for that matter, "cynics" was a nickname for the philosophical school that flourished in Greece in the fourth century B.C. It was a school that advocated the essence of virtue and self-control – no cynicism was intended. In their view, man has to accept everything with equanimity and contentment if he wants to become a superior being with the traits of self-sufficiency and freedom from ordinary desires and conventions, and, if it comes to that, even to be able to live contently in the proverbial tub as Diogenes did.

In its present meaning, cynicism has a completely different task. Today's cynic does not go beyond the act of passing judgment and faultfinding; he is incapable and unwilling to remedy the situation. Even if cynicism arises out of a legitimate bitter experience, old wise age, or exceptionally keen observation, it remains the same – a vain indulgence in captiousness and annoyance that only adds to the sorrows of the world. The sore point of a cynic is his profound distrust, his doubt-exhaustion, which not only hinders good wherever it can; but if carried to the extremes, it may even paralyze the consciousness. With such habits, no man under heaven could possibly get access to our lost treasure called wisdom.

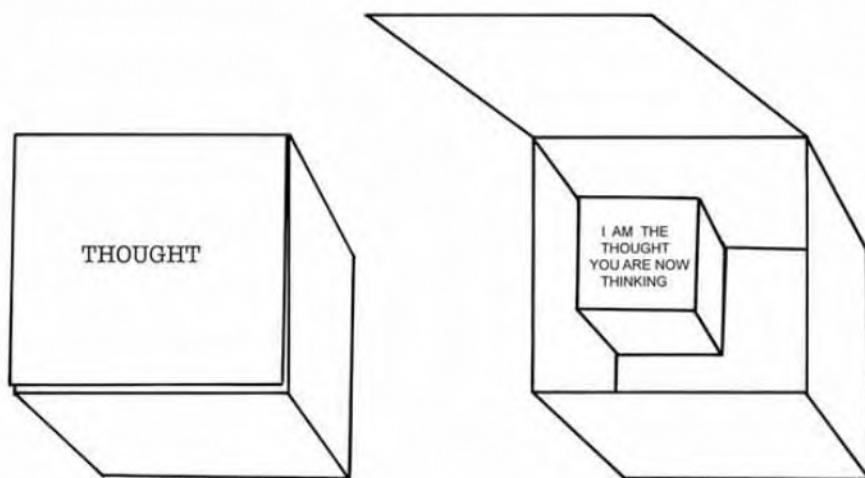
If we set up our thoughts in less traditional forms, the images of the cubes may come to represent an appropriate language with their lapidary expression piercing a defensive line through our mind-numbing security system. In a closed position, the cubes keep the secret message intact, but when opened, the idea is demystified. Why? – lesuaceB. Can we amalgamate our knowledge or, by the same token, our ignorance in one word without an iota of meaning? That brings us to a loop of doubts concerning the intellectual capacity of a man, who can invert the true order of things by his subtle



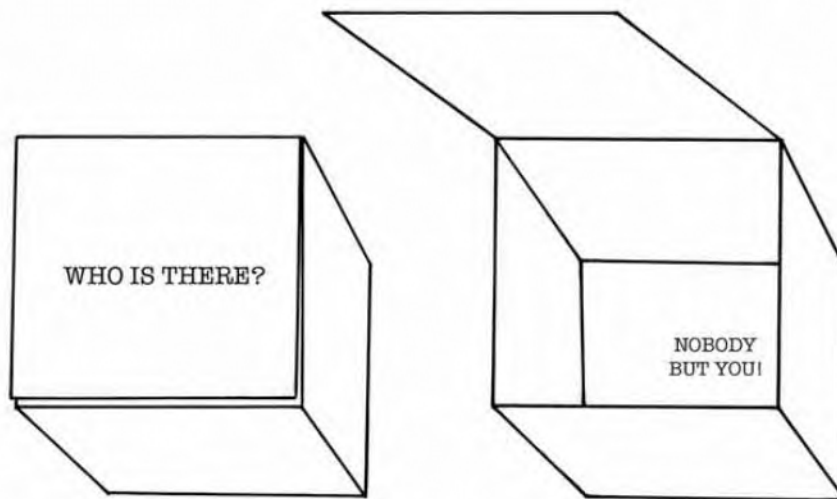
R. G., *Cubes*, 2004-8, shown
in closed and open positions

sophistry provoked by tangled logic and the variety of conundrums. On the other hand, the intellect, when it is tested, is also serviceable for simple, practical reasoning for everyday use and hard wear.

In some slowly processed afterthought of the binary word “be-lie-ve,” we must acknowledge the importance of the human mind in that very process. Moreover, the mind by



itself, in the case that it is present, must assist us in that acknowledgement. For the great majority of people are inclined not to think, but to believe and support whatever is served to them by the power of authorities, be it a political or a creative field. When dangerously limited intelligence is imposed upon the crowd, it often succeeds and the consequences are sure to follow. How then can one find an orientation in the jungle of false views? Though different in regards to their matter, the two contrary notions conveyed in one

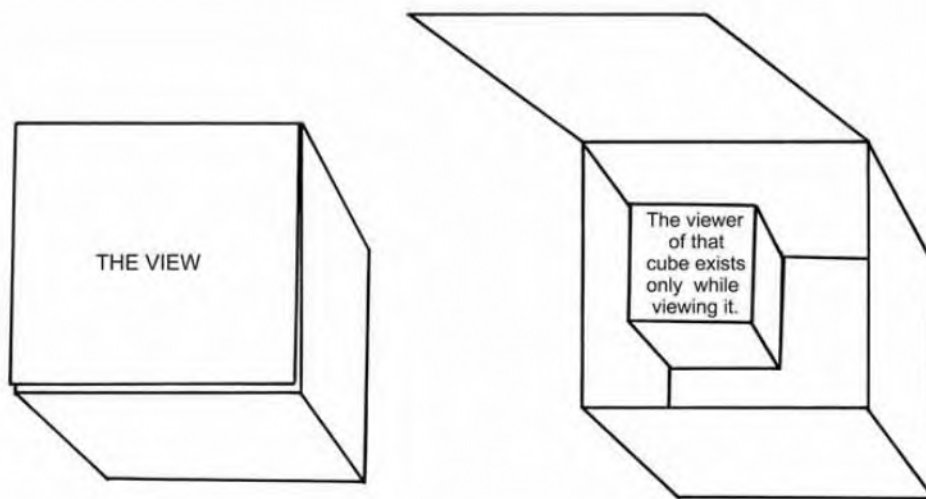


R.G., *Who is There?*, 2008

word “be-lie-ve” are molded from one source. Their subtle verbal connection is puzzling: one meaning contests the existence of the other; while at the same time both stand and fall together.

Such syllogism might easily serve us as a theoretical preamble for our practical confrontation with many layers of presentations of truth. The funniest bewildering encounter with this tricky diversion happened when we watched American TV for the very first time the evening we arrived in New York on February 26, 1980. If you try to look at this spectacle with the unaccustomed eye of the novice, who just

has arrived from another continent with different social and cultural norms, you can roughly imagine those fresh impressions of the first day. As soon as we randomly switched on the TV and watched our first and last soap opera, we were puzzled with the repetitive sounds of laughter, somewhere behind the screen. Who is laughing, where, and why? That “stimulating ready made sounds of joy of tentative happy spectators” (that how it was explained to us later) seemed to testify not the humor but rather its lack, suggesting the

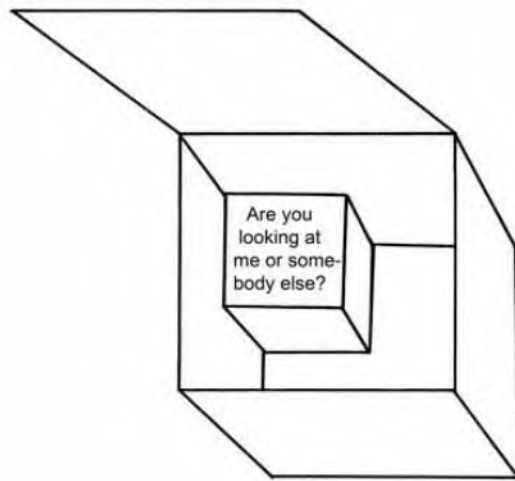


R.G., *View*, 2008

ominous picture of Dante’s paradise of fools. Next on the screen appeared the crying televangelist, whose tears were broadcasted larger than life. The sobbing audience added an impressive refrain to the soloist. We thought it was a parody in the style of Moliere’s *Tartuffe*, and only later, to our great surprise, were we told that it has a genuine, mesmerizing meaning for the crowds of followers. The wrestling show, right after the evangelist, was no less bamboozling; the wrathful sacks of muscled bodies attacking each other did not look real either. We had never before seen such bestial wildness among sportsmen, save in comical animations for

children. For the late dessert of our first entertainment menu, the cheap production of horror movie presented one more utterly new flaunt for us, since Soviet TV lacked such assortments. Switching between the channels we managed to spot Nam June Paik's non-eventful black and white video, strangely contrasting with the bedlam of the other late night shows. Thus, we were introduced to religion, sport, and the other cultural assets of local pop-culture in a couple of hours.

Firmly shielded by our humor, youthfulness, and an



R.G., *Cube*, 2008

artistic interpretation of kitsch as some kind of funny conceptualism, we did not pay much attention to this *carte du jour*. Nevertheless, the first evening in America became a conspicuous outline of our future Wild West “experiment” that was later to be progressively observed, sensed, felt, then tried, perceived, and finally set aside. In brief exaggerated form, it was shown to us, as a forecasting shadow, our future encounter with the gross expression of the four elements, if we put it on the theoretical basis of the Ancient Greeks. Thus, the earthbound soap opera, the TV evangelist with his liquidity, fiery wrestlers, and airy spooks grotesquely symbolized the inferior sides of the pertaining energetic powers, their

base modes and tones in the lower world. The earth element was presented as a ridiculous display of morals and values locked within their property-progeny loop; the water rose as a tide of faith in its most rudimentary form in the variety of disguises, be it an organized religious institution, or free-market eastern, or New Age enterprise. The element of fire grew on the aggressive tendencies of hash individualism, bordering on atavistic selfishness that always goes along with the struggle for the priority in whatever field. And finally, the air was represented by certain people and situations, which surrounding atmosphere was permeated with macabre psycho-

Read My Lips © 2002



logical fragmentation and mental disorders exploited in *cinema noir*. Clearly, that figurative interpretation of the four elements, with their anxiety and quarrel, building up and breaking down, bears a residue of different difficulties inseparable from all great undertakings.

On this day between winter and spring of 1980, we finally switched our personal program from the channel of the oppressive legislation of the Saturnine Soviet Union, to the New York channel of Plutonian freedom, full of oddities and much more. “Brothers, be of good cheer, this night we sup with Pluto,”— the legend saved for us the words of Leonidas said to the three hundred Spartans before the battle of Thermopylae. From the window of our hotel room, we saw the chipped back wall of the Empire State Building, much too close to our window. The massive wall left only inches for breathing air. Should we be-lie-ve the reality of this introductory episode, or bury it in the dark mirror of nature?

Upon reflection, it appears that discrimination between the two contrasting principles spelled in one word “be-lie-ve” might be possible, at least partly. For that, as Voltaire suggests, one needs “the principal talent to bring to light the truth, which all men seek to obscure.” But not everything combines in favor of it. Even on the subjective side, vapors of intellect may drug even a wise mind away into the web of illusions. Lucid knowledge and calm, deliberate presentation rest upon intellectual intuition, both of inborn origin and of acquired property developed through a gradual clearing up of the practices of perception. First, the mind has to gain the strength and obtain a natural gift for abstract thinking and circulation of ideas. But that is not enough. Genuinely clear thought can objectify itself in spontaneous understanding only if intellectual contortions are subdued by intuitive simplicity. Under such conditions, at least some of these make-believes become visible with the naked eye; with an eye that is unveiled, wide open, and uncorrupted – hence it is naked.

Of course, this assertion might be interpreted merely as a projection of a possibility. There is, after all, a difference between a desired state and a practical attempt at its reconciliation with an illusion. Add to this the difference between the “educating” of the mind and the “tutoring” of the soul. Even if we accept that all coming information that might be open to us in the future is already located in our conscious-



Because © 2005

ness, it is still hard to distinguish the truth from its interpretation and to recognize the general ersatz-quality of maya in the whole theatrical production of nature and our particular role in it. Therefore, during the time of making our early artworks we had to be content with the small. One thing was clear: carried far enough, we were engaged in a live search, preserving our spiritual aspirations as the chief interest of our lives.

If we step aside from the sphere of creative ideas and enter the world of the events, the picture will change. The moving in space, from the East to the West, was a preamble

for our moving in time, from youth to maturity. Both these shifts involve adjustment and lead to the so-called process of individuation that requires some “pruning” of the environment: separation of the tares from the wheat. How does this so-called pruning relate to the binary meaning of the word “be-live-ve,” that simple word that one day we saw with different eyes and literally performed that seeing? Perhaps one does not get things before they get him, meaning that all the instructions given by life are more useful than theoretical knowledge if one wants to penetrate into an explanation of the confusing world of facts. There, in that field, lays the secret that we tried to express with the wrong spacing of the “unan swera bleq uest ion,” holding a circle within a circle.

Unanswerable Question © 1992
photo, metal



Its message would be overly scattered unless the title of the image were to put the beads of syllables together in *Unanswerable Question*. What then is the question that one can expect no answer? Perhaps it has not been. Certain subtle notions cannot be expressed with ordinary speech; that is why all old religious texts are loaded with symbols and bewildering parables that directly involve the intuitive qualities but not the reasoning intellect that comprehends the synthesis of contraries with great difficulty.

Aphoristic intensity can act like a vitalizing breath, hinting at absoluteness in the midst of absorbing relativity. The world is full of brain spinning, hindering, and confusing events, which often act as a paradox within a paradox. Both

Infinite © 1992, photo, metal



the sea of irrationality and the wind-driven ship of fools are our brain-testers. Yet, it would be unreasonable to ask the reason to explain the unreasonable. Naturally, this returns us to the same loop of paradoxes, the navigation of which certainly requires a sense of humor. It helps us float over that loop of assiduous cultural activity and avoid sinking in its absorbing flux. More than this, some people prefer to tell the truth, laughing as, for example, Voltaire did in order to “keep himself from going mad.” Master of his craft, he could transfix a personality with an epigram like a butterfly on the head of a pin.

As much as culture tries to domesticate mankind – poets, artists, and people with similar liberal inclinations are not excluded – we found no use in acting up to its popular ideas produced by the modern industry of arts. The bohemian branch of that industry, however autonomous a spirit it appears to express, replicates the same matrix. One can spend much time relishing in being critical of the art world, the prosperous breeding of mediocrities, and other cultural and social oddities, yet remain a legitimate part of that very matrix. There is no sense in going into an impish display of criticism; each person has to discover for himself the difference between the reality and its exterior surface decorating the stage of the world on which most men play social and political games. What seriously concerns us here is the deeper metaphysical law that governs all nature’s games, including its social office. This is because even the awareness of that law gives a clue to certain independence, or at least a possibility to be less deceived by their outward show. In such perspective, the metaphysical “game” of facts hides some deeper meaning that is strange and confusing, therefore apparent even to those who reflect the least. There are many inexplicable gaps and zigzags in the rules of life when two times two might unexpectedly give us five.

II x II = FIVE

If one ventures to tackle the metaphysics of absurdity with the stiff means of serious language and logic, it might end in sophistry. The best aid in such an endeavor seems to come from enchanting humor. The same key opens the mys-



Two by Two © 2002

terious sphere of conceptual art, or rather the conceptual sphere of mysterious art, in which one can always trace an ingenious and somewhat childlike way of combining incongruent elements. No animal has sense of humor; no animal can laugh. They are too busy with the survival of the fittest; so are men. Ask yourself who is best in surviving the struggle of the fittest in our social world and what particular qualities need to be developed in order to do so. Are these individuals the most humane, truthful, and altruistic, or quite the reverse? Usually the strongest surviving species in the social order and economy (e.g., political oligarchy) are the most selfish,

unscrupulous, and untrustworthy people. They alone never seem to be fooled. On the other hand, they are the least desirable type for the spiritual progress of the race. That also implies that the development of the mind – that exclusively



Square Root of Two © 2002

human faculty that is both deceiving and easily deceived – is a source of constant surprise that might be carried to an absurd pitch of evil.

Not everybody can enjoy the privilege of feeding the mind on the combusive power of the paradox. In original Greek, this word derived from the root *doxa* (opinion) and has been diversified into “orthodox” and “paradox.” This

antique “*doxa*” must have been quite a loose “opinion,” parenting such differences that stretch from conforming, conventional “orthodox” to its own opposite, nonconformist “paradox,” nicely defined by Chesterton, as “truth, standing



Angle © 2002

on her head to get attention.” The prefix “para” adds to that opinionative “doxa” the sense of “beyond,” something beyond any opinion, and perhaps somewhat “para-normal.” Therefore, for any normal person, the opposite, i.e. the orthodox cause, is always the more prudent one. As for us, the paradox plays first violin in the orchestration of our concepts as an instrument and method for attaining neces-

sary ends.

The seemingly self-contradictive device of paradox carries not only a possible truth, but also the humor of the occasion, keeping one a prisoner of its comically perplexing situation. "I sometimes wonder if it's true that who is what and what is who," to put it in Winnie-the-Pooh's plain words. Logic does not allow us to ask the question in that way; besides, it is so hard to reach that which is the most simple by not busying ourselves with trivialities and by acting in accordance to the dictates of our hearts while skimming effortlessly over the surface of difficulties, lustrous with paradoxes. And the latter are far from useless. Winding its would-be victims through their ridiculous often amusing content, paradoxical situations are able to bring about a certain release, helping man find his (and, of course, her) orientation in the bittersweet scenario of the world. Frequently such an attitude buoyed us up through our life journey. Initiated by our conscious and unconscious volition, this journey

R. G., *W-hole*: The circle with "hole" can be rotated, 1988, plywood, acrylic, 17 1/2 x 17 1/2 x 2 3/4"





Beyond © 1992, photo, metal

was outlandish in many ways, accompanied by seemingly pure chances born of the chaos operated by its and our karma twined together.

Instead of regarding the tragicomic content of the world in a gloomy manner, one might view and co-play it in a more light-hearted absurdist way – maybe even laugh about it. Such is the power of a witty remark or the delicate touch of a joke made in good spirit that can dissolve the unpleasant with a reverse sense of pleasure in good humor. Sometimes a parody with clever and good-natured content can express the paradoxical doctrine so decidedly that it produces a constructive and uplifting effect, thus serving not as an appendix to the truth, but as an instrument for its catharsis. The idea of deploying humor toward virtuous ends is not new. Laughter

is often described as the world's oldest therapeutic remedy; it refers all things to our incomplete self, thus stimulating the desire for completion. Taken far enough, humor can harmonize and transform a serious metaphysical message, turning it into a physical and metaphorical one, so that one can partake of a joke without devaluing the initial idea. Both its verbal and visual content might help resolve the paradoxes hidden behind the limitations of life. As a counterpoise to them, we try to unite essence with nonsense with the help of the sense. Precisely that operation is depicted in Rimma's work of that very title.

When closed in its customary position, the circle *Nonsense-Essence* is a metaphor for a centrifuge of nonsense, operating around its central "no." But no! It hides another meaning: the panel featuring that "no" can be lifted to reveal the morpheme "esse," (Lat. "to be"), thereby shifting the initial meaning to its other extreme. Essence and nonsense are two sides of the same thing, in a sense. How often in life, paradoxes turn into truisms. Thinking in this direction, year later, we repositioned this visual formula from the wood

R.G., *Nonsense-Essence*, shown in two positions, 1988, wood, acrylic, 13 3/4 x 13 3/4 x 2 1/2"



surface onto the face. The volumetric parameters of the visual poem were notably increased, migrating onto the human flesh thus obtaining a new vital impulse. In its new location, “nonsense” peculiar to certain blind alleys of our reality became even more apparent, being emphasized with



Sense © 1989

the neo-realism of the camerawork. Photography helped us to literally humanize visual poetry.

Everybody runs the risk of moving within the circles of dualities that are disguised as absurd limitations rendered foolish by blow. The sacred process of the unfolding of human nature is full of profane zigzags that conform one to another through a series of paradoxes. Reasonableness and mental sanity, in general, tolerate a great deal of the impossible and unthinkable. Taking the form of a paradox, the inconceivable manages to insinuate itself between cause and

effect thus putting one in the position of an observer with a better possibility for the right decision. However, the capacity to perceive the differences without a contradiction is gained through the long process; perhaps its length is emblematically reflected in the prolific German word conveying that very meaning:

Unterscheidungsempfindlichkeit.

(A nice title for a movie.) Probably the longest in the Indo-European family of languages, that word-train conveys the imperative philosophic notion suggesting the necessary prerequisite for the synthesis of contraries – the capacity to perceive the differences without a contradiction. Stretching into a line of 30 letters, it is already a procession in itself. No irony is intended; even more so if we compare the theoretical facilities of German language with their equivalents in English, barely equipped for metaphysics. Historically, its principal speakers are known to be more interested in economy and sociology, and, fortunately for all of us concerned, in literature. (Therefore, in passing, we are tempted to mention James Joyce’s gibberish neologism as a linguistic curio overloaded with 36 letters “contransmagnificandjew-bangtantalit.”²²)

Returning to the one word expression of the unity of the opposites, we find that in the ancient Sanskrit there is a parallel word, only three letters shorter, which means beyond perception and non-perception:

Maivasamjnanasamjnanayatana.

Both German and Sanskrit words appear to have the statue of incontestable statement, in which we saw a scholastic version of our formula of “non-sense-essence” presented in the image *Sense*. That work is not only a linguistic joke shining with alliteration, but it also depicts the play of paradoxes, the concept requiring a certain training of mind in order to understand its meaning. This instance enables us to say that any aphoristic devices have to serve the purpose of meaning. They’re useless if they’re deployed purely for the sake of their eye-catching eccentricity, adding even greater perplexity to an already perplexed-enough world. The

low-key nature of modern art is that it draws attention mainly to deconstructive realities and primary instincts, feeding largely on the artist's ego drives. To add a further twist to the spiral of paradoxes, cynics are often very well adjusted in the



Never Odd or Even © 2002, reads
the same backward or forward.

very society that they regard with irony and contempt. Successfully criticizing popular trends, they play on that very cynicism of our self-indulgent culture. As the two extremes often come together, cynics might agree with the bold optimism of Leibniz's famous dictum that we're living in the

best of all possible worlds. There arises the natural question, “In what way?” The answer: because all other worlds might be even worse. Consequently, it should be added that only in a state free of the striving of opposites, is one exempt from their contradictions and ensuing suffering, in which “this best of all possible worlds” is imbedded. Therefore, the mastering of paradoxes that neutralizes their just and unjust causes seems to be a prime necessity for a sovereign intelligence in the given reality.

The casuistic duality of nature can be illustrated by many means: the play of words, numbers, events, and, naturally, the egg. Analytically, the egg is an organic end that hatches its own beginning. That very conundrum is demonstrated in the mirror composition *True-False*. If in *Be-lie-ve* the central “lie” serves as a radioactive element for its X-ray, here that role is ascribed to the egg. The mutual “e”-endings of the two contradictory notions delineates the well-rounded shape of the egg, which is full of potentialities. The Romans identified any starting point as *ab ovo*, which literally means “beginning from the egg.” In our concept, it serves as a uniting point for the beginning and the end simultaneously. With symmetrical dignity, the two profiles, like two sides of a coin that has one coinage, bear the inscriptions “true” and the backward “false.” The two meanings are compared in disputation, making it impossible for both to be true or false. Not anymore hidden in the form of a subliminal message within the morpheme as in *Be-lie-ve*, the falsity stands openly against its adversary, mirroring and serving the truth in an inverted manner, say, as a disobedient dog, which reversed “doG” nature is distressingly hidden. Even though the result is a cognitive dissonance, that flip-flop has a hidden metaphysical point that brings to mind the hermetic aphorism *demon est deus invertus*. And the egg seems to retain the mystery of a solution.

There is a relevant ancient Hindu parable concerning the theme of a religious quest, an ever-popular topic in Asia. Once an eager devotee approached an ascetic and solicited his guidance on spiritual life. The sage looked at him steadfastly and suddenly asked if he knew how to lie. Upon hearing the seeker’s pious answer that he did not dare to tell a falsehood, the ascetic bluntly replied: “Then go and learn it! Afterwards I shall see what you might be taught about spiri-

tual life.” The first impression is that the story mocks the pretentious display of spiritual manners that linger between the social normative and common superstitions. The irony is that people have an enormous capacity for self-deception; knowledge and learning are of little use if not the opposite. Until genuine sincerity replaces hollow piousness, all instincts stay alive, endowed with reasoning and safely masked by devotional conduct.

There is yet one more side of the story – seeing without understanding, which is a usual attribute of the raw seeker. Apparently, the virtue of truthfulness is valid only if it is held with the knowledge of its opposite. That is how an assumed incapacity for a vice conduct differs from the real incapacity,

True-False © 1992,
photo, metal



which is, in fact, the negative capacity not exercised because it has already been outlived and left behind. The scale of black and white is located on one line, and these two colors are complimentary opposites, extending into a middle grey color on both sides. One has to master the whole scale in order to understand its extremes and hues: from the black “non-color,” the root of all shades, to the white “supra color,” the synthesis of the spectrum.

On a more abstract level, a similar binary is demonstrated in the composition *Absolute – Relative*, where these two words (the latter of which is inverted) are simultaneously shown in a state of war and peace. If we take the endings of both words as a unifying point, the letter “E” (a conventional glyph for energy, as in the formula of the theory of relativity $E=mc^2$) would already hint at the answer. Creating a corridor of similar images with the help of the mirror, we linked these two notions through their mutual energy, extending it into both sides *ad infinitum*. To boil down the explanation to a couple of thoughts: energy molds matter – absolutely and relatively – and the concentrated mind is able to use energy for that matter, for better or for worse. Hence, the entire “mathematical” drama is envisioned on the human face. But here, too, conflict lies in wait.

The question is posed: how much can the absolute swing to the side of the relative (at least in our lifetime)? What degree of the knowledge of truth can be buried in the coarse world of outward facts and forms? We could reply by instancing the similar case in the most unscientific way: such ominous oscillation was the dream of a little girl mentioned in one lecture on Gnosticism. She saw it in a surprisingly conceptual manner: once upon a time, there lived Something, then came Nothing and ate it. That laconism, as impressive as it is succinct, ingenuously amends Heidegger’s famous question: “Why is there something, rather than nothing?” To aggravate the matter even more, we would equate the child’s dream with a nightmare of the theoretical physicist, so profoundly dark it is. (Very likely this happens when what is expected happens, as the existentialists would desolately remark in such case). Endless doubts can be projected into matter’s dark mystery unless one relies on the positive signs of our intuition. What if the absolute is swallowed by the relative, and, perhaps, will reappear in another stage, in



Absolute -Relative © 1990

another life? On the other hand, what can happen if the relative is swallowed by the absolute, thus ceasing to be relative? Both finales seem to belong to the eschatological subject. With that, we are not proposing that the world would be reduced to meaninglessness.

Yet, a related query is valid. The first attempt at a reconciliation of the absolute and the relative inevitably finds a temporary relief in denying the validity of one or the other. For a crude materialist, the absolute is not tangible and, as being invisible, indistinct, and unreal, it does not rest on commerce – in short, it has a rather *relative* existence. But for the idealist, who wants to draw out of all that exists its essential principle by rejecting everything that is unessential, the relative is just the veil over the absolute. *Katha Upanishad* says: “He who sees not the One behind the many wanders from death to death.” (2.1.11) Postulating that things can be expe-

rienced but not grasped, the Buddhists, on the other hand, suggest the middle way that can harmonize the conditional and the transcendent. As for the rest of our over-habitable world, people do not bother with such notions unable to make head or tail of them.

As if by treachery, the opposites act upon one another and, so to speak, accommodate themselves to one another: therefore, on the photograph, they are presented as equals. The reverberating looking glass generates endless multiplication showing various progressions and partitions in measures of their partnership. The gap between them is filled with some unifying E-energy, smoothly (not always though) uniting the otherwise diametric projections. This instance enables us to see a certain analogy between the picture in question and the precise scientific approach, predicting that in time, time's renowned precision will also be proved quite relative.

The flip-flop presentation of the binary seems to increase its relativity, but, in fact, every effect expresses its cause even if it is reversed. Thus, the relative also mirrors its source, but not without alteration, while remaining nothing more than a relative towards the absolute in each possible combination. In a way, it's a picture of multiplications of thoughts going in both directions: toward the absolute and toward the relative. They're like two ends of a rope; one end inevitably follows the other, and both ends go off into infinity. Apparently, deep wisdom is realized only with knowledge of its opposite. There are many gradations within their correlation, from the mundane level to the most abstract fields also pervaded with delusions. This same reciprocity can be expressed philosophically in Sanskrit terms: for the ancient Indian mind, it was the usual state of the world when *dharma* (the right way) was always accompanied by *maya* (the illusion of creation). That state of the world is still the same, and apparently will be readily available in the future.

9: I' MAGING

We live in the world of time, yet something timeless is striving to be revealed through time in spite of the transitory illusive forms of the phenomenal world that press themselves on the foreground, shadowing the permanent and unalterable. If we hold a mirror up to nature, the distinction between reality and its reflection would be difficult to make, for one is similar to the other. That is the nature of nature's reflection. Time is always about to run out on all that we see in its mirror, and neither the image nor its lifetime, its content, nor its power of influence, can be called entirely our own. One point, however, may be granted: the reflecting process of such *I'maging* triggers the enigmatic release, probing the

I'maging © 1989



transpersonal with personal intensity.

Appearance vs. reality: that is what each of us faces making any decision. They are a mixed blessing: both entangle and both hurt. So it is in the work *I'maging*, which depicts a double process of imaging and aging. The individual "I" works as a catalyst in both developments: in progression towards something that we might see in our mind's eye while imaging the future and in the regressive process of aging that is actually seen with our physical eye. Thus the pendulum of the mind with the code of its own oscillates between invisible imaging and visible gravity of life. Depicting the split-up tendency to atemporal and temporal modes of existence, *Imaging* and *I'm aging* play somewhere in between the territories of timelessness and time. The melting thoughts of the finite body stimulate the imagination into a dual activity. Must we really give way to emotions about aging? There is nothing new in the notion that physical life is temporal and, in biblical terms, people live "according to the flesh," which "presses down the mind."²³ Nobody can escape the inherent characteristics of our bodies that are chained into

R. G., *Mirror Cube*, 1975,
glass mirror, each side 3 1/4"



the complex of birth - growth - vigor - decay - death. Naturally, we all are at liberty to think that way and be wretched.

Just because our life isn't everlasting, it doesn't mean that it can't be timeless. So how can this contradiction be explained? As all the others are. People see only the smallest part of the whole, on which they like to pass their judgment, and they are usually less than correct. That rather familiar idea is presented in *Mirror Cube*, made years earlier than the photoconcept *I'maging*. All sides of this hermetically closed cube are made of glass mirrors; they are impossible to see all at once. We are always on the side of the cube that we are facing, and the rest is not our looking glass. Of course, it is easy to circumvent the geometrical limitations of the cube with a bended mirror that would produce the panoramic view with the dazzling power of maya. In this way we shall get the total reflection with all its overlapping parts of a single whole, but would it be more real than the one-sided reflection of *Mirror Cube*? One such experiment was projected in Rimma's early environment *Mirror Ball*.

Mirror Ball

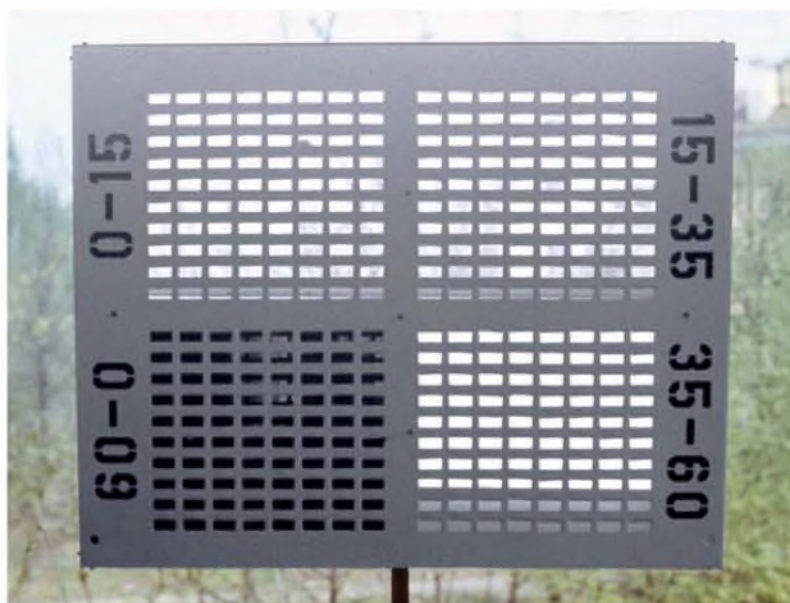
The two-meter diameter ball mirrored inside and outside is designed to be used by one person. When inside, on the background of the all-round reflection the person pronounces his full name. The special sound equipment produces overlapping echoes. The sound dies down only after the individual has left the ball (30 seconds; so the individual still hears his own voice from the outside). Thus, the ball produces a sort of delays the obtrusive and hypertrophied visual and auditory perception of one's own self. 1975

Duplicating the parallel mirrors multiplication trick of infinite reflections, a vision might be used against itself in an optical illusion. Trapped in it, one is in danger of mixing one's own "I" with the collective "self," capable of drawing an individual into its ocean of shadows. Entering the hall of mirrors associated with the realm of death in folklore, one would find it tricky to separate personal flights of the imagination from the impersonal influence of carrying the destructive symbols. With profitless meditation upon them, be it deliberate or involuntary, one would be tormented and drained of energy. With that connection in mind, we are tempted to add one more magical archaism associated with the looking glass *I'maging*, namely, the folk-custom of placing a mirror before the nose of a dying person. It was in that way, in so-called grievance of duty, that people checked the last breathing of the departing or perhaps tried to catch his "evaporating" spirit – his "I'm" – in the soul-trapping mirror. That is why all mirrors were covered in black in the house of mourning.

Am I dreAMing of anI'Ma?
UnlI'Mited... prI'Meval... I'mmaculate...

Going via the trackless way in the ocean of relativity, the looking glass speaks its washed away language, arousing a latent force. Then the reflection, which for a moment seems to analyze itself, easily fades away, leaving not a track behind – nothing but a figment of I'magination. That is what we see in the light of nature, not in spiritual light, which nature merely reflects. Let us give an optical example of that concurrence.

The heavy metal object *Age Apparatus* depicts the proportional relationship of the narrowing vision of the world to the aging process. The front grid of the metal box is divided into four sections – each representing a range of ages – through which one can see its interior. The first section represents ages zero to 15 with an open window behind it. The second section, for ages 15 to 35, has a clear glass window behind it. The third section is for 35 to 60; its back glass is frosted. In the fourth and last section, for ages 60 to zero (i.e., until death), the looking glass occupies the entire field of vision. In a gradual descent through planes of increasing



V. G., *Age Apparatus*: In section 0-15 the window is empty, in 15-35 there is glass, 35-60 – frosted glass, 60-0 – mirror, 1974, enamel, 20 x 25 x 8", stand 36" high. The State Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow

opacity, one is alerted to the merciless impulses of time and one's own instinctual habits, reflected in George Orwell's remark that at age 50 everyone has the face he deserves. That what we see in the mirror reflecting human timing, but in God's mirror we are aging at the speed of light. And our general fear of growing old includes the fear of death approaching.

Two phases of the aging process might be distinguished, both calculated by years and by their worth. According to Schopenhauer's measurement, "The second half of life proves even more dreary than the first."²⁴ True enough, since quantity often determines quality, yet there is another side of it. If one is able to develop the power of adjustment to life's inevitable surprises, the mind might be relatively at ease in any situation. In other words, the phases differ as much as merely old age differs from the wisdom of age. Those who

live long may turn their passions into different channels: into family interests, physical endurance, or heaven forbid, senility. Or quite the opposite, they may channel all their impulses into understanding and knowledge, and in rare cases wisdom – all is in the lap of the gods. However, the latter privilege of an old age is possible only if one possesses a certain degree of intelligence *apriori*, otherwise, when man reaches the happy age of wisdom, usually he has none. In the actual world of the present, characterized by the struggle for survival, the older people grow, the more cynical and hardened they become, for their accrued negative experiences are gradually clouding their vision. The weakening of the mind along with the body is another price of aging.

To a degree, some of the dark corners of that process might be illuminated by mythology. Such is the case with Mephistopheles who said that the devil is very old and that in order to understand him, Faust has to grow old as well. So he does. At a certain moment his patron spirit appears and makes old Faust's life far more exciting than it would have been had he reached old age in a state of bewildering metaphysic disappointment, wondering what it had all been about. With the catastrophic price, his "new" old age has brought him a proficiency in projecting dangerous realities on others. Seen from that point of view, the wisdom of years begins to sound rather confusing unless it includes not only knowledge of evil, but also understanding of its opposite. Here we are again in the loop of contradictions: since "the presence of God" eagerly sought by the mystics is not in time, it is in the eternal "now" that knows no aging. If weariness in time is a "healthful" experience in Satan's territory, the very same concept might create an obstacle in the way to the upper regions. However, we are not referring to the aging process, but to the concept of time, of which old age is only a consequence. Is not time and the counting of time preventing us from the knowledge of the eternal? Perhaps people would be content to let time stop – especially when counting their own years – but no human authority can suspend time as they suspend parking regulations. *Nolens volens*, we are compelled to "do" our time for a lifetime.

The days and months speed rapidly by, but before we deal with the results of that speeding in the later parts of our lives, let us first catch a moment of intoxicating restlessness and

half-willful bravado of the early age. On average, a young man is not inclined to gloomy thoughts and a morbid disposition; his moral corruption is at the very start, or at least is not yet complete. The helpless feeble-mindedness of old age is so far away that it seems improbable, even in his imagination. If some good principles had been implanted into the young soul, its idealistic and realistic strands, both yet immature, do not obstruct each other and therefore complement each other in youthful interplay. Such vision, relatively speaking, is still transparent. So too are the first two sections of *Age Apparatus*, representing it with an open space and a clear glass. A frail mortal in his early youth is not a secure sort of person, but is rather an adventurer and, should it really take place, looks like a walking commotion of vanities, desires, and naive egotism.

Confident in his vital abundance, even an adolescent

Reflection © 1992, photo, metal



likes to reason about death, usually without actually thinking about it. The youthfulness, in spite of its weaknesses and sometimes even due to it, makes one partly and temporarily immune to erosion by society, to one's own not yet developed personal fixations, external gravity, rigidity, and inertia. Certainly, all this does not proceed in any fixed order. Each person is in no way like other men; nevertheless, that brief summary may serve as a blueprint of how adolescents have behaved according to their biological patterns from time immemorial. There are many colorful phases of growing, maturing, and aging with many invigorating and wonderful qualities to go along with the unfortunate signs of degeneration. These signs all vary depending on the individual character and the fluctuating external circumstances that in certain cases might be quite permanent if one's entire life is frozen in hard and merciless situations or in a dreary and uneventful existence. On the other hand, life might be scattered in vanity and exalted in power, wealth, and recognized success – and nothing else. “Extraverted as hell,” as C.G. Jung would comment on it. The other way around is not better, especially in the extreme, for the introvert is totally immersed in one's own personal preoccupations and complexes. In truth, the plain, unvarnished facts of human existence are far beyond the scope of our observation. Following that simple logic, *Age Apparatus* presents strictly symbolic gradations of vision: clear or through glass that can be transparent, opaque, or reflective (that, in effect, might reflect darkly).

In assessing the influence of age on the matters of faith, we intend to say something that might be open to doubt. When the body is young and active it tends to overpower spiritual concerns. In the intoxication of the exalted hours of youth, the body's passions are very active and leave no place for the spiritual search, which in turn usually bears little or no fruit. Overwhelmed with their own vitality, people serve the necessity of circulating nature, acting behind their instinctive propensity towards breeding and dissipation of energy. The typical French point of view on the matter clarifies it flawlessly: If youth but knew, if old age but could (*si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait*). That is why in various metaphysical disciplines proselytes are admitted to the important information only after they pass the age of their middle-life crisis when they are not yet old, but old enough to have had

their share of experiences. There are limits in that as well: the psyche must not be too weary of the wretched life, willfully excited, or conversely asleep, as it usually happens not only to provincial householders but also to respectable sophisticated burghers. In our greedy age (or perhaps at all times),

White Beard © 2008, photo, metal





Diver © 2001

people in certain financial brackets do not want to be disturbed from the below or from the above. In other words, the more one engrosses in natural habits, the more one immerses in fate. It was said that the wise know when to resist fate and when to yield it. With that, we come closer to another phase of aging that demonstrates the strength-in-weakness of a human being.

In the later years of our life, we are able to evaluate experiences more sensibly. As our bodily vigor diminishes, suppressed thoughts about permanency increase in an attempt to counterbalance the otherwise unpleasant process of aging. Locked within one's own looking-glass enigma (as in *Age Apparatus*), one is left to wonder whether it is a faithful

mirror of life or an optical illusion of the mind. A fading mind? Is it possible to return to childlike simplicity in harmony with the creation and, if so, certainly not in the sense of the senile second childhood? It might or might not be there, for in the materialist imagination the real body is housing the illusory soul, while for an idealist the real soul is only waiting to be free from the illusory body. Besides, there is a significant difference between the charisma of intelligence and the virtue of wisdom, and between the idealistic feelings common at any age and the exclusive knowledge of the sacred.

Outside the notion of time, the main argument remains the same: if the soul is immortal, nothing can happen to us except perception. And what about the point of no return? In that difficult state so near to annihilation, perception is immensely inflated in the crystal ball of memory that has been patiently polished by the years of aging. Inflated, perception melts gradually and finally disappears, being not much different from our impermanent body. That which is dissolved into the sphere of invisibility has only a relative existence. If so, all will be relative in our dimension, limited to the material world with no clear perception of anything that is above earthly facts and physical striving. Coming to such an extreme, it would be safer to suspend the critical judgment of reality, not by abandoning it altogether, but by rather letting it hang in limbo between the relative and the absolute. Since the relative is always referring to something else, we must consider it only in comparison. If our soul is the mirror of the universe and our body is the frame of that mirror, as it was frequently suggested, then there is no game of chance in that – we are born and have to be in our appointed place and time as an indispensable fractal part of the big picture. An eternity is unaffected by the passage of time and decay, in which we are messing around or rather kept enmeshed in them. Anyway, it is not for us to set verbal limits to such phenomena. The sages, who came to terms with the eternal at a later age and saw the whole world in the mirrors of their consciousness, were said to have undergone a natural process of revival, eventually a supra-biological process. It is that kind of natural revival that goes against nature itself while the latter continues to keep us aging.

There are countless symbols associated with mirrors,

which polished surfaces never failed to intrigue omen-seeking onlookers, for mirrors might bring oblivion, devour everything reflected, forecast the future, and measure an eternity that trespasses space and time. In them, things can be fully present and completely absent simultaneously, and not only in the artistic setting with its illusory props and scenery, but also in more abstract terms of time and space in which our bodily life takes place. In some measure, a setting of that kind is staged in the image *With Mirror*, in which the realistic painting and the still performance, as well as illusion and reality, become naturally concomitant to that theme. The painting shows a certain geometrical peculiarity hardly encompassable by realistic criteria: the parallelogram of the mirror “assaults” the traditional squareness of the canvas with its sharp corner. Certainly, it is not an overlooked stylistic mistake, but a specific way of interpreting the perspective and its distortion in the looking glass. Repeating the rhythm of the painting, the photograph seems to present a copy of another copy, while together they create the *mise-en-scène* with the four personae: one is alive, the other is painted, and the remaining two are their reflections. The portrait, which is not remote from a naturalistic likeness, looks rather imposing, as if it is ready to stand up, move, and show signs of life. Taken as a whole, the mirror game creates its internal world and then inhabits it, making the subjective forms appear versus their objective molds.

As itself, the looking glass is a thing without an inner reality, even when it seems to look at us independently through its own eyes, fragmented and vague, yet stretching the boundary of our *I'maging*. To elaborate a little: the composition of that work takes us back to the folklore motives characteristic to Indian goddess Lakshmi and her Greek sister Aphrodite, for both gracious ladies were often depicted with feminine toilette accessories. According to many ancient canons, the image of a woman was accepted as an emblematic personification of nature that is working half-secretly in her latent activity, whether she sits or “walks in beauty.” In that sense, nature is definitely “she.” The chain reaction of her phenomena is serenely reflected in the play of mirrors. At such condition, nature is a dynamic force of life that acts through its non-acting, through its graceful presence, deriving a keen unfailing pleasure from its art. The whole

story can be speedily formed under one's active imagination, but if it operates without a touch of reality, it would be not less perplexed as a mirror game. That calls to mind a very true observation of Plato, suggesting that matter is a lie and truth at the same time.

Taking that as a premise, let us look once more at the still performance *With Mirror*, in which the symmetry between the reality and the world of reflections is replayed with sublimated naturalism of the reflective glass surface. Translating this binary into the digital language, we could come to the following arithmetical picture.

V.G., *With Mirror*, 1985, mosaics from syringes, canvas, homasote, acrylic, 53 x 50 x 3 1/2"



Behind the looking glass of zero,
+ 1 sees its reflection in -1

in the symmetric duality of its own nature.

To present illusion-as-reality, the photograph unifies all four layers of the happening: the real figure, its rival portrait, and their fictitious reflections.

In the world of symmetric forms, one can circulate continuously. Perhaps the most picturesque warning of that wandering came to us from the Dionysian mysteries. Upon receiving a mirror as a gift specially fabricated for him by celestial smith Hephaestus, young god Dionysus became so infatuated and mesmerized by his own reflection that he went after it – and fell into the matter. In the mirror, he saw his multiple selves, each full of endless desire, yearning, and dissatisfaction – and forgot who he is. With great effort, Dionysus tried to extort himself from the gravity of matter, but having been carried already too far, he was torn into pieces by the titans. Here we have a refined sample of psyche that has been working hard enough at its own ruin, learning the principles of matter through its own dissection. Is that what men are born for? According to Orphic tradition responsible for that myth, such is no part of the divine creative intention.

At the appointed time, the seemingly lost god was resurrected through his heart that had been snatched from the titans by Athena. The interesting point is that Dionysus was saved by the two mental deities, Athena and Apollo, and not through catechism or cerebral reasoning, but by the ways of his own heart. The true-false reflection in the mirror of life provokes both reflexes of self-examination and self-forgetfulness, resulting in wandering in the continuum of optical illusions of both the external life and the internal psyche; as in the world of things, so in the world of ideas. All the chaotic enterprises of each new Dionysus last until he gains a foothold in *self-understanding*, finding the fulcrum through *nosce te ipsum* (know yourself). A reflection is also a thing, but not real. To see the real in matter without losing the way in its mazes is a privilege given only to those who are free of its gravity and who are ready to be born not into this material world, but out of it. This transgression is almost impossible. Yet, the ancient knew this path that is as “narrow as the razor blade,” so it is said in *Katha Upanishad* (1.3.14).

10: MANYNESS

A series of concepts literally passed through the looking glass when we began to deploy bending-mirror surfaces. This opened up an entirely complex field of vision in our photography, enhancing it with dizzying kaleidoscopic imagery. Two adjoining mirrors create the visual effect of mathematical infinity. With that, we seemed, to enter the realm of mind-boggling multiplication of reflections of reflections of reflections... shadowy corridors with no discernible end.

Chaos © 1990, C-print in stainless steel frame, 48" in diameter



In the visual formula *Chaos*, inscribed on the face, the chemical and cosmic meaning of the word is equivalent to shaping the chaos within the self. The collective self-image is dispersed in all directions, as if cast into the universal chaos, while in essence it's one indivisible union. Nothing is separate; division is evident only on the mirror surface. One is simultaneously the one and the all, dividing oneself into the creation of diversities in their endless reflections of *pars pro toto*. Our dissipating organic formula tends to repeat itself as a structural net, yet in some kind of disorder, as signaled by the very word "chaos." Considering the fact that scientists describe chaos as constantly changing stability, the order having its disordered components shown in confusion might be "an order of indefinitely higher degree," as David Bohm suggested. That seems to echo the Biblical concept, "In my father's "chaos" are many mansions."

We experience world as both an organized completeness and in discrete sensations, without any action on our part. To give that idea an allegoric turn, the world soul might be pleased to feel its latent desires fulfilled in us. That might tingle one with melancholy and cheer up the other, making him confident in his awareness of the unity in all things – the molecular chaos repeats the galactic chaos, and both are reflected in our human mental mirror. Naturally, the very notion of holism entails one more theoretical curiosity known as holography, according to which the mind has the ability to "simultaneously comprehend the whole and every part." So it follows that the mind has an astonishing capacity for information storage.

The essential feature of the *Mirror Series* is that all works reverberate with fractal repetition, the copious images, smoothing and hiding the features of the main face, which is the principal host of these multiplex mutations. The distorted reflections create a strange polymorphic legion of singularities, giving the impression of a single, crowded face. The multitude of thoughts and plurality of worlds here suggests a collective self-image, as if we were visualizing an echo, all within one, within all, within one.... People are placed in the world as in a theater, whose stage extends everywhere, and everywhen the continuous performance is on.

To explore that concept on a deeper level, let us return to Rimma's early cube-environments, in which the spectator is

transformed to performer. The series of that projects opens with the two-meter sized *Mirror Cube*, 1975, all interior sides of which are made of mirrors. Upon entering the cube, the spectator finds himself in the focus of all its six mirrors, astonished by enormous multiplication of his own reflection. The immersion into this environment with reverberating self-image is accompanied with repercussive quadraphonic sound. A polyphonic poem is recited slowly, similar to an echo, by an invisible announcer whose voice would preferably have hypnotic qualities. The text is recorded by means of multi-tracking, producing a multi-voiced reverberation. Here, one experiences the effect of audible and visual synchronization, of the echo with the infinite corridor of reflections of the listener. One intermediate strophe from that sound poem might give a sense of its many-voiced composition.

1st voice:.....

2nd voice:.....

3rd voice: I am continuation of life I am continuation of life I am continuation of life

4th voice: I am pores I am ready I am here I am seeing I am hearing I am people I am sample I am number

5th voice: I am photo I am volt I am veto I am hundred I am spectrum I am liter I am meter I am point

The dominant rhythm of two words “I am,” said in unison, works as an acoustic acupressure that endures in the background of all other words, with seemingly dispersed and disconnected meaning.

Returning to the photographic model of that soundtrack, we enter the so-called mythological chaos mirrored in visual art, this same art that is implicit in the term *maya*, derived from the Sanskrit verb “to create.” Cast in the universal chaos, the self is divided into *Manyness*. Having many voices, each with its own shadow, one is multiplied – that is how the chaos of the universe reflects itself in a persona. Life operates in the cells of our corporeal structure, and holds us in the prison of her automatic responses through these little dissipated selves. Naturally, it is easy to go astray. The chaotic activity of mind might be a personal problem, yet straying is a tendency of mankind as a whole. The interior life might appear as many within one, taking shape as a forest of



Manyness © 1990

heads, watching eyes, and talking voices within a persona and its collective totality. Definitely one is not alone in oneself. In reports of LSD-experience, many claimed to be able to multiply themselves, feeling “now and then” mixed within their kaleidoscopic imagination.

Thus, the image *Manyness* is both one and everybody else. What if everybody else prevails over the one, manifesting as multiple personality disorder? The collection of the smaller selves might have different autonomous tendencies. Imagine then what is going on with “supermultiples” (as these patients are called), who develop more than a hundred subpersonalities! Each “tenant” might have his/her own peculiarity: different habits, different illnesses, and so on. With the change of personalities, one (to use the singular with precaution) can change as a weather-cock, for instance, switching from the state of heavy intoxication to absolute

sobriety instantly. In parallel processing, one personality can sleep, while others are busy with something else as if they were different snakes of the Gorgon's head. The most unusual trait of multiples is that they tend to heal faster and age longer, since one of the personalities often happens to be a kind of medical practitioner, watching a well-being of the whole organism. However, the disadvantage of this strange community is in their disconnection with each other, like an orchestra without a conductor.

A couple of words may be said about the individual trajectory of the photograph *Manyness*, which in its own typographic way was also engaged in a process of multiplication. Going beyond the scope of art, the work appeared in several college texts books on psychology, sociology, and psychiatry, in reference to depersonalization syndrome.²⁵ Salvatore Dali, whose works are frequently used to illustrate a variety of mental disorders, once said that "there is only one difference between a madman and me. I am not mad."²⁶ Sometimes an art process is equivalent to the mythological adventure in which the hero rides his horse into the other world. And from there it is no great distance to the state where one's own thoughts begin to take the form of personalities wishing for an identity and a name, even if they are only made of thoughts. In a creative way, a plane of existence of many people might be fused into the imagination of one mind. Perhaps that is how the catastrophic democracy of subpersonalities in our *Manyness* might be explained. Its idea, at least the way we have planted it, is rather conductive: the initial impulse has to pass through multiplication in order to be restored to higher order of unity. It has to pass through the dissipation of past structures, which on certain level work against themselves and interfere with the state of mind in a negative way.

Although the drawings in the *Mirror Series* look like the PET-scan of a supermultiple mind, the mirror images have nothing to do with madness. They focus on unconscious processing, which might be described as something in us that knows what it does not know that it knows. If one is to find out that secret, there must be a chorus master for all those voices. In many ancient rituals, a symbolic retrogression into chaos was an indispensable stage for the formation of an advanced individual, who – viewing him from the perspective

of our unity oriented topic – would become coalescent inside and out. This, however, is not a condition which may be speedily accomplished.

Looking at humankind, it is not easy to find a person with an adequate means of understanding the world, still less of mastering it. Captivated by the continual transformation that nature is undergoing, all people experience a certain degree of psychic fragmentation, usually in a much less dramatic way than we have depicted it. The phrase “I just haven’t been myself lately” is a typical example of mental dissipation and fogginess. Not only that, healthy people do not even notice that their thoughts are fragmented. It often seems that our thoughts think themselves. We cannot stop them; so they never cease. An individual exists in an unsuspected state of being, a multiplex of thoughts and inner voices. Each of these voices assumes itself as Himself, each

Self © 1990





Dramatization © 2001

having its own whim and its own singular point of view. The stilling of the thought dissipation is beyond the capability of the average person. Moreover, before even trying to pacify these inner voices, one has to realize that he has them.

We do not go so far as to give the status of physical reality to that realization, but it certainly implied in our mirror images, depicting how raw animistic substance is worked by “psychization” into a union. Baptized in the underground waters of one’s own *manyness*, rising into a union, one survives its chaotic phase, as the phoenix survives its ashes. In the process of “in-di-vi-dua-tion” all that has

been separated is reunited, yet on the higher level of assimilation. In that, one must trace the same law of organized chaos, according to which the multiplicity of creation is, in its essence, a unity. That concept can be stored in the human brain in thousands of pictures. To present some of them in their diversity, we would like to digress to our early work, touching upon the same subject but using a completely different language of forms.

The red figure of *One-Man Show*, one of the *Cubic Organisms* created by Rimma, personifies a random individual, so to speak, the man in the street, whom we meet by pure chance. This has to be seen, not in context of sociology, but from the perspective of a metaphoric art. Suspended by strings from the ceiling, the red figure is similar to a puppet manipulated by rods, only we do not know whom and where its puppeteer might be. Like an organism that consists of many cells and a plurality of thoughts, the suspended individual is composed of the separate cubes united by one string. Each cube can be opened and contemplated; each cell holds a clue to some life experience. For example, the central interconnected cube with the interior text, "I consider myself independent from the rest of the cells," suggests one of the typical individualistic thoughts that contrasts with the reality



R. G., *One-Man Show*, 1982, detail, the interior of one of the cubes

of an incessant patchwork quilt of interdependence. In reality, *One-Man Show* is a one-man crowd, – just as is a man living a hectic life, sure that he has plenty of freedom because on the surface, this is what seems true.

The cell structure of *One-Man Show* constitutes a full body made of fifty-one Pandora's boxes, each presenting a



R. G., *One-Man Show*, 1982,
cardboard, canvas, wood,
string, acrylic, 89 x 31 x 4"

trap for a curious eye. At first sight, the monochromatic figure appears to have a solo show with its monologue, while in reality, all its cells voice their own testimonies in a tangled polylogue. In fact, the cells of any living organisms have certain autonomy, and may choose to obey or disobey their owner. Thoughts also communicate in many voices, each changing others in the incessant stream of associations. To use another euphemism, the psyche enwraps consciousness with its net of feelings and thoughts in the same proportion the body covers soul with its flesh. Timeless in essence, but temporal in activity, a man is the sum of his physical, psychological, and mental processing, interrelated with the same conglomerate of impulses from outside. The average person does not even suspect the crowd of his inner voices, resonating the different frequencies of habits, reflexes, and natural instincts that dwell in his subconscious. In a way, each person is a one-man show – a live experience grounded in experiment. Being the crowning achievement of nature, man is a micro universe, while the universe is a macro man.

Before reappearing in photography, our ideas were first explored in art objects exhibiting the same changes in forms. To be exact, the cubes and squares gradually moved to the circles; and the theme of multiplication was not an exception. That very process is depicted in the three-dimensional visual poem *Un-di-vi-ded In-di-vi-dual*, in which rhythmical patterns convey an uncomplicated message: facing the multiplicity, each outward persona is prone to experience dissipation. Rotating each circle, one can dissect the words symmetrically or scatter the syllables in a disorderly way, making a verbal portrait of an in-di-vi-dual more agitated and less uniform. Wherever the “train” of thought of such un-di-vi-ded mind takes its course, it is always hemmed into its own “dual” center. The calligraphic inscription “dual” on the middle circle adds no contradictions to the fact that such man, or rather his dear persona, is entirely self-centered, unless it pretends to deceive itself and others. The persona is uncorrectable, always doing the same thing under like circumstances and cannot do otherwise, behaving in life as if in the pages of literature. Being the sum result of all superficial thoughts, feelings, and volitions, it conquers each *homo naturalis*, the literal embodiment of the transmigrating soul of everymen. The fluctuating potentialities of persona easily

cloud the mind, filling it with passions. Indeed, a superficial persona is quite comparable to a cloud, empty as it can be save the “pregnancy” with precipitation. (In that, we cannot negate its temporal usefulness.) Rooted in the impulse of self-preservation in matter, man is incapable of looking at things objectively. Therefore, the integration of the consciousness is possible only through the dissolution of the influence of the murky persona and its multiple voices.



R. G., *Un-di-vi-ded In-di-vi-dual*,
1988, wood, acrylic, 13 3/4 x 13 3/4
x 2 1/2". The circles can be rotated.

The diversity of experience embedded in the human mind links each and everybody, as it were, to the rest of humanity. In *Fecundity*, the mother brings forth children who bring forth other children who bring forth other children... In this way, all people in the world are relatives. Following this pattern, each creates the other – from subatomic particle to entire universe. Each figure extrapolates itself into replicas of themselves, exhibiting elements of randomness that almost,



Fecundity © 1990

but never quite repeats itself. Imitating the unfolding of life, that multiplicative “axiom” is both an expression of the world-dream, and the extension of nature on the physical plane. Such is the law of generation: from one to *manyness*, further and further from the union with the One.

Let’s look at it in a different way, starting from the paraphrasing of Descartes’ rule “I think, therefore I exist” (*cogito, ergo sum*) into “I think, therefore I create.” In *Fecundity*, the beginning of all creative events is depicted on the forehead, suggesting certain mental participation in the whole process – a scattering creation of all principles of all things from one source of one mind. And this very mind, for its part, contemplates these created principles as everything in everywhere and at all times. Simply put, there must be a harmony of the world, the soul, and the mind. The procreative principle can be viewed as a process emanated by Thought. Hypothetically,

all that we can think is reflected in the spatio-temporal mirror of life, from the most vast to the smallest of worlds, each unit is individual and yet all is one. Think only what you THINK! And beware of thought leakage! The widespread Eastern doctrine, concerning the conception of the world, created solely from the subtle matter of generative thought, might give an objective turn to our visual concepts of multiplication, lacking not certain subjective features of the faces.

What if we look at the paradigm of *Fecundity* backwards, tracing the reproduction back to its source – here comes the old sun god Kronos, depicting the devouring side of the mind. The Father of Time who, in his Greek form of Kronos and in Roman disguise of Saturn, had the unpleasant habit of eating his children and spitting them back into the universe. As usually, we placed that “heartbreaking” pluralization right on the face, but now all is topsy-turvy. Appear-

Kronos © 1990



ing as a vast shadow on the foreground, the looking glass reflection takes the leading role, while its progenitor, the real face, is shown upside down. It is not clear whether one is devouring the other, or the reverse, each blowing the other out as enlarged “bubbles.” The centerpiece mouth holds the secret, one for the two faces; it is a singular entrance/exit, similar to a wormhole connecting parallel dimensions. Of course, one cannot know how such a wormhole might look like without probing in reality; and what *on Earth* this inter-fluent reality is and where to find it – that is another question.

Surviving in secular primitive beliefs, many exoteric myths have deep esoteric roots, such is the curriculum vitae of Kronos/Saturn, the oldest god in the ancient seven-fold system of the planets/gods. Containing within his entity all previous stages of development, he is the guardian of the final “ring-pass-not;” therefore, each next generation of gods is both blown out and sucked back through his powers. He creates *manyness*, in other words, and also reduces it to singularity. As an intellectual provider, Kronos does not participate in the active life process ruled by his son Zeus/Jupiter, who represents the vital power of various qualities and quantities. For the enlightened Hellenes, Kronos inhales and exhales not the gods, but conceptions, ideas, and thoughts. In that sense, our image depicts not an anthropological catastrophe but a thinking process, the art performance of thoughts touching upon the theme of evolution and involution.

Here we should concede the pre-eminence of ancient Hinduism over the much younger mythology of Ancient Greece. In *Mahabharata*, to be exact, in the *Bhagavad Gita*, there is a similar scene when Krishna opens his mouth before prince Arjuna, showing within the whole universe and the horror of its destruction, while, in truth, he shows the mouth of devouring time. Unable to bear the sight of the awesome mouth and the display of Krishna’s power, Arjuna asks the god to return to his illusory human state. Illusion is what feels safe and normal, while the vision of reality induces madness. In another related myth, the sage Markadeya goes in and out of the mouth of god Vishnu (Krishna is his avatar), while trying to understand where the real hierophany takes place: in the mouth of the god or outside it. He travels between these two worlds until he sees the image of both at once, as a double exposure, and realizes the unity of his soul with God.

With all their latent content, the Eastern and Western traditions are part of a common current, both one and diverse. Hence Krishna and Kronos, the eternally young and the eternally old gods, “legally” share the same mouth of devouring time.

Now back to Greece, our European cradle of art, philosophy, and science. Because of Kronos’ seemingly unrewarding job, the patriarch among the antique gods remains a

V. G., *Heads*, Emily Harvey
Gallery, New York, 1985



symbol of old age, asceticism, and dry intellect; while, in the hermetic lore, he holds a rather noble position, as a stimulating force for independent spiritual formation, or however one may formulate it – the vista known only to sages. The energy symbolized by Kronos appears to be both separating and uniting: separating from the world and, in a certain sense, from the body, when the gravitating body stops pressing down the mind; and uniting what was previously divided and bringing all together again but on a higher objective level, so the sovereign mind becomes capable of conquering itself. And that was the first and most holy prerequisite for self-knowledge, considered priceless treasure among the wise men of Greece. They searched not for knowledge in the regular sense, but for the alternation of consciousness per se. Besides, there is a difference between dry intellect and high intelligence, between knowledge and wisdom, which gradation and magnitude are moderated by the objective forces often concealed behind the masks of gods. Therefore, the worldwide analogs of Kronos, such as god Shiva, the Indian saturnine elder, Kabalistic *Binah*, or *Thrones* in Christian angelology, are all members of one “uncarved block.” Their images were not so much explicit as they were inspiring. Speaking of the real life, some philosophic doctrines also transmit the spirit of Kronos, the mental god who would qualify *The World as Will and Representation*, just as Arthur Schopenhauer did *sub rosa* in his two volumes of that very title, the collection of his scrupulous observation of life with undeniably constructive intelligence.

The same mythological parables might be presented in the language of the psychotherapy, take, for example, the concept of intellect in its self-analyzing supremacy and tendency to feed on itself, creating and absorbing its own thoughts, thus playing the role of a demiurge. Again, a very colorful version of a mental banquet comes from the Indian sources, confirming the perennial unity of worldwide myths. The parable goes like this. After performing extraordinary austerities, the ambitious demon in a half man, half lion body (note the parallel to the Egyptian sphinx) attained high power of intellect and decided to subdue Shiva, the principal ruler of mental properties. But stricken by Shiva’s third eye, he began eating his own flesh – until there was nothing left but his face. Delighted with that self-consuming mystery, Shiva named



Secret © 1990

what we can call the rest of the lion-man “Face of Glory” and appointed him as such to a position similar to that of St. Peter, namely, at the heavenly gate to ward off evil. What is all this about in context of our time void of mythological clouds? In the dramatic struggle of opposites, of self-inflation and self-consumption, the incurably external appetite of the ambitious intellect gradually becomes cured. The spectacular and agonizing event led the ambitious creature to the mental self-conquest, which gave him the privilege of guarding others from the similar weaknesses.

Obviously, the concept of synthesis via separation was very well known in the world of long ago, but it was more or less kept in secret. Those who were able to perceive it had a significant (thorny, yet splendid) experience. Going through many knotty questions, and learning, among other things, not to confuse unity and uniformity, they gradually developed an

ability to comprehend metaphysical differences in how unity determines the regeneration principle and uniformity controls the generation phase. Even so, the notion of unity might be rather deceptive: if blended with conformity, it produces a merely pseudo-unity, a fusion without integrity, the bottom line of which is mass consciousness. Today the meaning of equality is closer to “sameness” rather than “oneness.” Naturally, the source of the dilemma is not in the expression, but in its essence, which refers equally to both processes. For the scheme of multiplication might be also applied to a backward movement, reducing one layer after another in reverse to proportional growth. We might say that the law of regeneration is a reversal to the law of generation; and there is a merging point between the two, a certain U-turn allowing transitional changes and growth from *manyness* to unity.

Now, if we look at it from above, allegorically speaking, from the clouds of the gods, both these processes would probably appear as the motion of ants, hurrying up and down their heap. Yet, there is a way out of the chaos, although it goes straight through the very chaos, which is superimposed on us – and in that, we have to find a proper orientation. First, one must learn that the *values* of plural and singular depend on how one looks at them. For those, whose interests are inclined towards multiplication in matter or, in the vernacular, towards prospering in the material world, all nature’s pluralizing patterns are firmly embedded in instincts determining our desires (for parenthood, property, all kinds of pleasures, and libido drives) – the generating gods would be their immortal guides in the labyrinths of life. Those, whose consciousness had passed all strata of physical experience, are first to accept the unity of all things and search for the ultimate unification with the divine creative source – naturally, the regenerating principles are their guideposts.

In the panorama of the *Mirror Series*, there are many images dealing with the subject of mind, as if everything has to go through our heads to be grasped and measured, thus, in the *Labyrinth*, a-maze-ing brain pattern is outlined right on the face. A network of hair extends beyond the picture – and nobody knows where the braided trails lead. What is obvious is that mind is a maze generator, which effect has to correspond to its cause. Otherwise it is prone to deterioration,

simply because the intellectual process as its own master eventually short-circuits. The edgy mind creates its own understanding, in which mental labyrinth one might be confused, get dizzy or, in the worst scenario, meet one's own Minotaur. In that case, the first goal would be to find the shortest route through the maze, provided one is gifted with spatial intelligence. Most mystical and esoteric streams get around this problem by the use of a hermeneutics full of twists and turns. Indeed, many mental pilgrims exploit contemplative "mazes" as a substitute for a pilgrimage. That brings us closer to the idea behind the image *Initiation* (p. 240) pertaining to the inner transformation and the remolding experience of grinding plurality.

The most provocative thought about "I" is that it is multivocal – the multiplier is multiplied. In spite of its singularity, that "I" is not the singular owner of its thoughts, tending to

Labyrinth © 1990





Initiation © 1990

propagate themselves. There are many “i’s” sitting in the memory storage of one personality. To illustrate their self-reproducing activity, we extracted all of them from the word “initiation,” leaving the rest of the illegible word to seal the closed eyes. Put through the looking glass transformation, the image *Initiation* fully shares its content with its title, which grammatical misdemeanor is committed not only in the service of art. The letters rise as the row of the ignited candles in an initiation ritual, in which all these misplaced uncapitalized “i’s”, these little selves that have lined up on the forehead, gradually melt in the silvery mist of their own reflections. It is long known that meditation on an echo or a mirror was helpful for one to experience an illusion of one's many selves. Beyond the surface of reverberating reflections there is something... something that is as good as it is bad, leading in a weird way towards the



Edge © 1990

infinite ...

that strange experience of misery before the experience of grace.

In the diptych with the seascape motif that seems to come from a submariner's nightmare, the *Waves* (p. 243) are rising and, overflowing the face, seem to create the graphic vision of *mysterium tremendum*. As if one were cast into the belly of Leviathan, into the matrix of undifferentiated life, in which one experiences the world as multiplicity melting into a seamless ocean with inexplicable "wrongness." The soul is overwhelmed by its own rising subconscious shadows, saturated with lurid external experience and regressive attainments. Our brain – and the mind is not limited by the brain – generates its own fractal patterns within its own great deep. The abysmal part of it is that any effort to change an obsolete formation of the psyche awakes many other unpredictable features, springing out of oceanic collective totality. Its

waves cannot die; they simply sink into the ocean and appear in a new formation again. For example, as soon as one tries to suppress one's anger or fear, they begin to pour their malignant chemicals into the body system, poisoning its overstressed nerves. That, of course, does not mean that the negative traits may go on a rampage, flooding our normal day life. The point is that it is not enough to suppress them; they must be transcended. The analogous scheme of "organized shuffle" is behind the Eastern concept of karma. It develops as a chain, so that when one thing ceases another begins. As without, so within: in the chemistry of neurological process, every ingredient of a personality creates resounding consequences as soon as it is touched with the intention to change for good or for bad.

Based on an antithetical construction, "a ritual of death" and "a ritual of birth" (perhaps, "rebirth" would be the better word) were fused into a single hybrid in many traditions. It transpired as an awe-inspiring experience of objectivity or, put in a theoretical framework, as a personal chaos entering the process of rearrangement into a *random order of organized chaos*. Here again we are in the strange waters of chaos, which might be visualized as a sea... seal...silence...

SEALENCE

The fluid "reality" overwhelms and makes one's head swim in an amoeboid universe of multiple selves. According to the testimony of one near-death survivor, he saw himself looking like a jellyfish, an amorphous and yet elastic self. For some people, meddling with shape-shifting apparitions and weaving nets of confusion might be the perfect form of communication. Think of Salvatore Dali, who enjoyed bathing in his subconscious mud.

Viewed through a theological mirror, God in unity manifests as harmony of each and all, while in multiplicity – as suffering and strife. Following that line, the symbolic regression into the *other* side of life, and its overwhelming confusion, might be divided into two major categories. The first depicts a reversal of life organization, emphasizing its negative aspect. This, in its basic aspect, leads to chaos, liter-

ally speaking, by disarranging all previous arrangements, and as such corresponds with the notion of drowning in chaos and death. The second meaning stresses the cosmogonical and creative aspect of chaos, which is the ground for the very beginning, the potential for a birth or a new beginning. The process of fragmentation of consciousness, when it is completed, tends towards its own reversal, towards concentration and absorption into oneness again. In fact, after extensive experience of apparent diversity in the world, we tend to seek unity within the self. When restless thoughts and habits are exhausted one may experience inner peace – then “ave” rises out of the “w-ave-s” as Aphrodite rises out of the waters.

wAVEEs of MARYne

That message is cryptically inscribed over the face covered with unsteady lines in the marine diptych *Waves*. In Christian tradition, “ave” is inseparable from the Virgin Mary, whose name means “star of the sea” (*stella maris*, Lat.) or “sea of bitterness” (Hebrew); both these “seas” seem to fit that image.

W-ave-s © 1990





Manna © 1990

Manna (from heaven) might serve as a psychedelic parallel to the amorphous deep of *Waves*, waiting for their “ave.” It is not a mere visual fantasy, but a hypothetical thought allied with the biblical symbol, suggesting that the unified Self might emerge out of the stream of interchanging identities or little selves. The dots scattered all over the image seem to produce a kind of pointillist suspension, or rather a field of vital particles. What if manna is a food of a different kind, a continuous field of “alive electrons” surrounding those destined to get out of the wilderness? So we envisioned. On the more abstract level, geometrical points are dimensionless, and their quantity, trickily multiplied by the bending mirror, is equally immeasurable. They are, and they are not. The manna is thrown in the unbounded expanse of its own reflection, evoking somehow the notion of subtle matter, incomparable to anything we know among the gross matter

group of people to utilize the possibilities of the other, and therefore the possibilities of the mankind as a whole. What if the complete exchange were to counterbalance that shortage? The list of questionable barter includes exchange of everything, not only the realistically possible swap of documents, properties, and ideas, but also ages, sexes, characters, past and future, bodies and spirits. It might be a joke, and yet, if it were a joke, what are we to make of it? One thing, however, is certain: such holistic craziness undermines the present order of life. If form takes over from formlessness in which all is centralized, a plane of existence available to one individual must be simultaneously present in the imaginations of others. Similar to reflections in two mirrors set opposite each other, everything can be reversed – the plane of existence of humanity may be seen or even fused in one mind. Would a complete and unified identity emerge out of the interacting of possibilities of our tellurian karma, out of the thus integrated cradle of humanity? As any utopian idea, such an incident wants confirmation.

Another world-dream example is found in The Utopian Project of the *All-World Birthday Celebration* (1977) that tries to reunite multiplication while tracing it back to its source through the ritual of birthday. The concept might be presented in a couple of sentences. Every day millions of people celebrate their birthdays with their family and friends, or – as the case may be – alone, while some of us do not celebrate it at all. We suggest that all people born into this world on the same day should gather in one spot of the globe when that day comes and celebrate together, thus keeping mankind united every day of the year. Such highly subjective personal events are focused into somewhat impersonally objective celebrations, similar to New Year's Eve, so an individual natal day becomes an experience of objectivity. Youth is very optimistic; given the opportunity, it can celebrate everything, which is not the case for the elderly or those who take life with silent diligence of duty.

Our birthday optimism may be depolarized by the knowledge and more complex understanding of the objectivity that includes both ends of the rope – birth and death, and not so much in their physical aspect, as within their spiritual context. (For God's sake, do not take it as a proposal for celebrating death together, though funeral ritual exhibits a

a certain ominous similarity to it.) The argument must be apt without being negative, and taken as part of human nature, supplementing our understanding of why some great minds celebrated not only their birthdays, but also their “death-days.” Take Socrates as an example. He seemed to consider the latter to be his birthday, his entrance into another reality and liberation from the current one, imprisoning his subtle nature within gross physicality. How else can we interpret his misgivings, reading “his” Plato’s words in *Gorgias*? “Who knows whether to live is not to die, and to die is not to live? And we perhaps are in reality dead.” (492e - 493a) We may reverse the meaning of these two important days once more, putting them in the less radical context, i.e. by equating and

Many-Eyed © 1991,
photo, metal



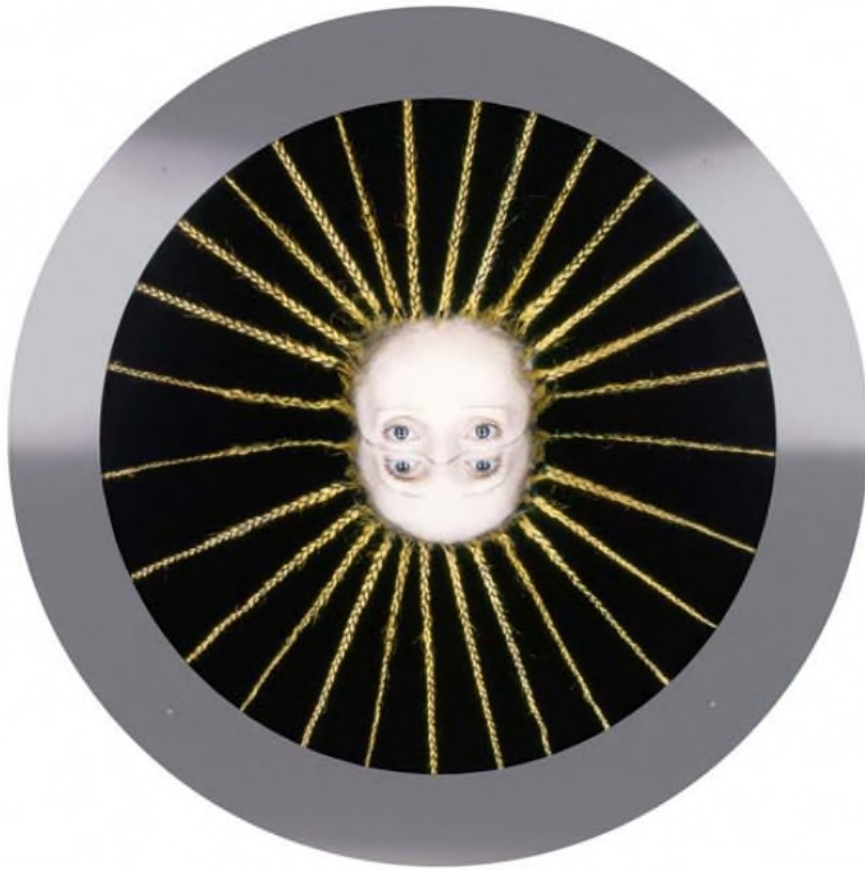
synchronizing death on the lower plane of consciousness with birth on the higher one. In other words, to die is to reappear on a new level, exactly as predicted in *Katha Upanishad*, postulating that the self must die before Self can be born. Shall humanity ever celebrate together this type of birthday? Here we are crossing the border into the realm that the metaphysicians have reserved for themselves, and it should not be taken literally.

Ending this chapter with these, perhaps, not so utopian hopes, we think of their therapeutic prospect; it would be better for people to yield to their propensities than to waste themselves in materialistic contradictions. Taking the idea of *manyness* vs. *unity* and putting it through looking glass lenses, we let it “melt” there, suggesting that the very thing that provokes an attack will also neutralize it. That means the process of the dissipation of the past is a part of the formation of the future, however unpleasant and objectionable it might be. The whole point of this illuminated retro-perspective manuscript is to show that art is intrinsically networked with feedback and *feedforward* circuits. As such, it touches the inner recesses of human nature, drawing it from itself and exalting it above itself to utilize everyone’s potential, therefore that of humanity as a whole. Truly, it is hard to put into words.

11: LUMINARIES

Raying *Sunrise* is also made with the help of bending looking glass. The light-giving and life-giving powers of the Sun are reflected in the sub- and **sun**conscious mental and emotional constitution of man, in which the sensible sun is but an image of our inner longing for brightness and sovereignty. In the round version of the great luminary, the braids “radiate” as the solar rays. To bring out a point of similarity, thoughts emanate both as waves and quanta, as force and things,

Sunrise © 1990-92, C-print in
stainless steel frame, diam. 48”



molding everything around if they are sufficiently strong and concentrated. We cannot control randomness, but it is possible to control and discharge thoughts envisioned as things, to get rid of unpleasant moods and ingrained popular concepts exactly as we get rid of ordinary garbage.



The whole cosmos is expressed in our minds in such proportions that we become centers of these proportions, beaming in and out. Changing both the human psyche and its surroundings, the unique focus of the sun energy vivifies with reason, yet remains hidden from those who are not able to perceive it. In that sense, knowledge itself is a master-light of the seeing. The Sun is not exhausted with giving away its rays, so we are not emptied with our mental emissions. If thoughts are our rays, they can travel afar. Are they extended as far as the sun's rays? Do they illuminate and warm, heat and burn? There were known so many rituals and techniques of the travelling on thoughts like on the solar rays. Whether they are real or not, discussing them will do no good because that needs to be lived out.

Having but an imperfect command of astronomical knowledge, we shall touch only upon the mytho-poetic image of the splendid luminary reflected in every aspect of our life. Man's "rolling head" of consciousness is like a solar ball rolling around the horizon, from the dawning East of childhood to the twilight West of old age. Finishing thus one day, it is ready to start another one, obtaining knowledge from the superconscious region above the horizon and from the subconscious denizen of below. The distinguished qualities of this so-called triumphant chariot – the radiating force of mind and its great power of influence – can be tremendously constructive but also easily misused. The more you look at the

Sun, the more blinded you become; in a mystical sense, the intensive “all-brightness” bewilders the eyes with its intelligence and splendor, inducing real blindness in those who dares improperly and are deemed to be immature. And not only that, assuming an indispensable role, Luciferian (literally, light bringing) intellect might be dangerous; at present it rules the technocratic traffic of matter.

There are other inferior notions of the sun in connection with the eclipses such as *sol niger* or *umbra solis*. Their blackening aspects prevail when positive dialectic is expressed in a negative way. However, this type of knowledge cannot be communicated directly; it may be expressed

Sundial © 1991,
photo, metal



only through symbolism and metaphors, used as common tools in the old scriptures. Here is an example of how the rediscovered in the Renaissance old hermetic text treats a similar subject: "Because the World is a sphere, that is, a head, and above the head there is nothing material, as beneath the feet there is nothing intellectual... But the soul of man is carried in this manner; the mind is in reason, reason in the soul, the soul in the spirit, the spirit in the body... Wherefore, we must be bold to say, that an earthly man is a mortal God, and that the Heavenly God is an immortal man."²⁷

In some *Photoglyphs*, there is no image of the sun but it is more than expected, which is obvious in *Sundial* and in *Stonehenge*, a "face-full replication" of the ring of megaliths from the desolate Salisbury Plain in Southern England. For the mind's eye, it is easier to gaze at the solar mystery through the stony telescope of the past. This relic of pre-Druidic, perhaps Orphic ceremonial rites (which the image tentatively evokes) was dedicated to sun worship, according to which grace pours into the universe through the solar door by means of its enlightening focusing rays. There is no need to inspect this famous place as during an otherwise uneventful excursion, it would be enough to mention a couple of facts to maintain the connection between the archeological data and the ideas, both reflected in that photoconcept. It is known that Neolithic Bretons used this unroofed temple as a gigantic sundial. A remarkable genius would have been needed not only for the precise positioning of these "dancing" 50-ton stones, but also their delivery to that location having special geodesic patterns. (For that matter, the concrete replica of Stonehenge in Washington State is an astronomically useless device.) This Neolithic-style observatory was used for calculation with the split-second accuracy of the solstices, equinoxes, and eclipses, presumably centuries before the Greeks mastered mathematics.

Yet, this architectural wonder is sketched on the skin not so much for its intrinsic merits but because it has some numinous connection with the human race. Therefore, it is symbolically projected back on the human face. For that purpose the special geodesic patterns of the human face are considered: the gate pillars are placed on the forehead; the mouth is led out, omitted from the consecrated circle; a third eye is tentatively marked with a stone; and the two real eyes



Stonehenge © 1991

are open. They are watching an event, perhaps similar to those fortunate ancients who had witnessed the dawn within Stonehenge ring. At dawn on June 21, the day of the summer solstice, the light passes along the main axis of the whole structure.

In the invisible universe of mythology, the sun divinity is everywhere, active by means of his rays; he is the all seeing eye of the world. But what about the moon? Is she not an eye too, half-closed and dreamy? In the imagination of many sun worshippers, the path to spiritual liberation is winding in the continually interrupted and unresolved maze of the reflective moon. Thus, Osiris was resurrected through the Egyptian Madonna Isis, alluding to the idea that the created universe was a coherent work out of love by means of wisdom. On the path to The Father there is no avoidance of The Mother. The Moon became the symbol of the passive capacity of nature to

produce, of which she was the life-giving fertile power, while energy was the male, associated with the sun – an ovum and spermatozoon, par excellence. Human imagination and fantasy were always projected on the sun and the moon, as



R. G., *Moon*, closed and opened, 1988, wood, acrylic, 13 3/4 x 13 3/4 x 2 1/2"

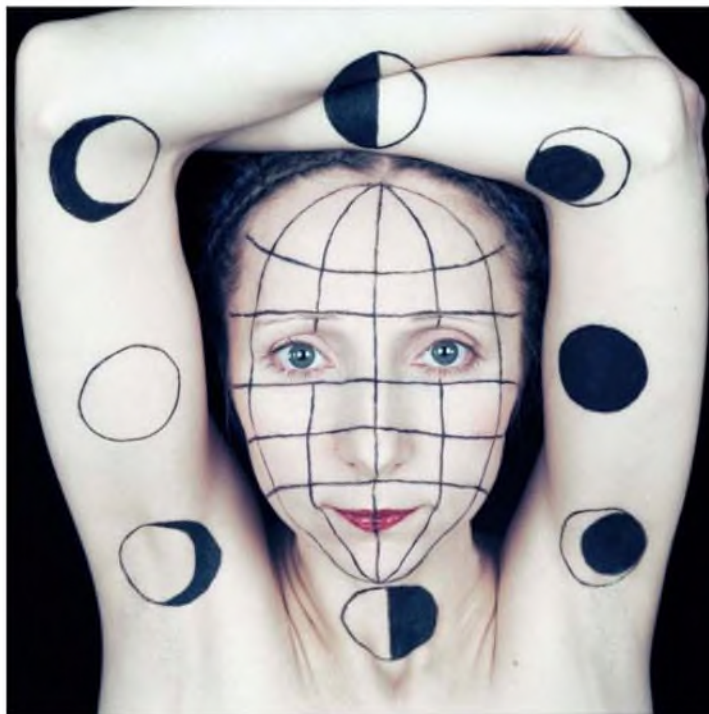


solar ideas and nightshade superstitions, as mental decisions and daydream fabrications and lunacy. If the sun represented the actual and spiritual light all around, the moon harbored something unpredictable, interweaving darkness and light – it was a mystic sphere divided against itself.

Moving to another secret of the luminaries associated with the measurement of time, let us turn our attention to the

Moon and by entering the sedating cycle of lunation try to examine the scattered allusions to its bittersweet magnetism. Different phases of the moon beat the cyclic rhythm of Sundays and “Moondays,” filling up our “moondane” activity. That recurrence is supposedly ruled by Luna’s magnetism that generates life, preserves it, and then destroys it – so far, that has been the theme for many lunar mysteries of the large multinational pantheon of moon goddesses all over the world. The watching Earth is central in that itinerary, while each month passes by like all the other months before it. Governed by chance and desires, all earthlings enter the delusive but familiar moonlight of the mortal world, injected with instability. Who was the first to observe that fools are changed by the moon? From time immemorial, that very time was measured by the moon. Does it follow that humanity is of the implied sort of intelligence, the moony one, with little

Lunation © 1990



energy or concentration? Yes and no. There are two sides of the moon. Let us look at both of them through the safety spectacles of different thought systems.

For the kabalists, the foundation of the tree of life belongs to the lunar sphere of *Yesod*, which rules the process of purification, the latent faculties, baptismal waters, the astral light, and so on. To sum up the lunar glories, it is a precinct of Archangel Gabriel, the inspiring messenger of God. However reputable that sounds, *Yesod* has its shortcomings. Veiled in ethereal phrasing, its pious values often are approached from a rather utilitarian point of view. One can luxuriate in all kinds of psychic experiences, including the exceedingly popular interest in health issues of the day, relaxation “yoga,” and, what is even more alluring, to find assurance that in the paradise of the subtle sublunary zone it is possible to fulfill all practical desires that were gestated but miscarried on the earth. Consequently, the moon is viewed also as the source of the intoxication of feelings, romantic sentiments, “moonstruck” magnetism, magic of all sorts, and on the top of this list, both folklore and “bookish” knowledge. In short, where the course of misty light is not real, the effect is surely unreal. Therefore, the foundation of *Yesod* has to be visited by the sunlight of *Tiphareth* as often as possible.

Symbols, stories, and facts about the moon abound all around the world are indeed endless. Let us draw now upon classical antiquity where the moon is personified by Artemis, the twin sister of sun god Apollo who she faithfully follows, mirroring his brightness. The lunar illumination with its reflected silver light is gentle, blending, and virginal; it retreats into the emotional domain of the unconscious. Lost in the mist of time, the widespread doctrine of the celestial influences attributes the origin of our body to earth; but the vital principle, which nourishes earth and causes everything to grow, to the moon. Plutarch described the universe as an “animal” or “thing” ensouled; the sun is its heart, and the moon is its liver.²⁸ The nutritive lunar sphere rules the vegetal aspect of existence, identical with the “astral” or subtle formative forces of the world. The aspiring virginal quality of the spiritual mind, ascribed to mental goddess Athena, also has some psychometric characteristics of the full bright moon, while its dark side belongs to dreadful Hecate, called a repository for all the evils of the world. In her region, the

wicked has full protection of the moon in his attack to the righteous. Therefore, the moon encompasses both

LIXE

Plato elaborated it further in his calculation of the interval between king and tyrant, good and evil. In his view, a regenerated soul is said to be 729 times distant from an unregenerate one. And that distance is measured by a sedating circle of lunation: the square root of 729 is 27, and 27 days make a sidereal month that is the time the Moon takes to complete one orbit around the Earth.²⁹ It is further of interest to note that the number calculated in antiquity reappeared in different disguise in the Biblical numerology. Adding together the digits of 729, we get 18 consisting of 6 + 6 + 6, six

Vivid © 1990

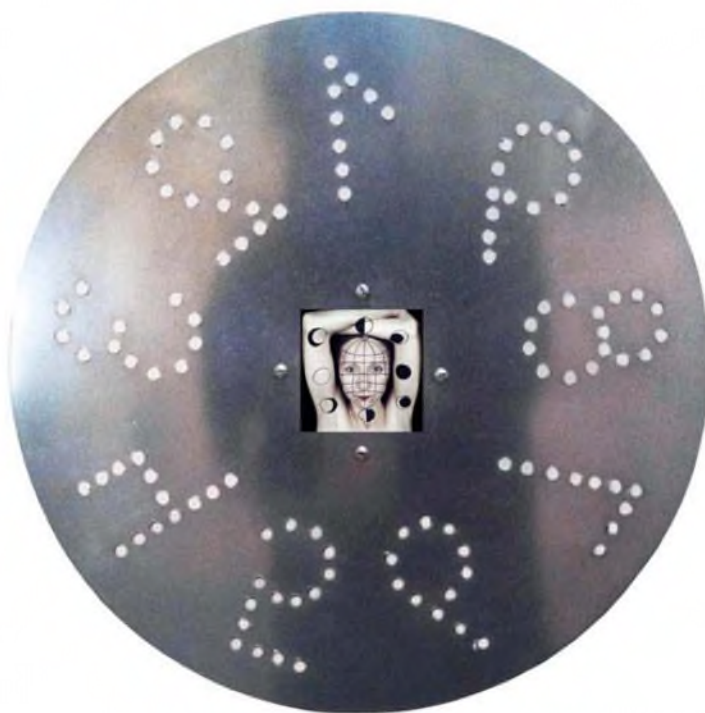


hundred threescore and six that denominates apocalyptic number of the beast. (Rev. 13:18) That is an arithmetical picture of otherwise mythological parable, and if we believe the assertion of Plato, that mathematical disciplines purify the mind, the numerological exercises in the art of interpretation of the old world allegories would not be harmful for today cerebral training. There are many facts and fables that remain hidden behind the “VI VI D” numbers of olden days and, perhaps, new times as well.

Our earth is a container of all things sensible, but man feeds not on daily bread alone, therefore it was a popular belief that the moon was kind of gateway or, perhaps, a funnel, which gathers and pours out the influences of the other planets onto the sublunary sphere, to which our Earth belongs. As the nearest heavenly sphere to us, the Moon provides the link between the earthly and the celestial, mythologically speaking, it is a sort of ladder, which steps might

Two Moons © 1991,
photo, metal





V. G., *Moon Calendar*, 1990,
aluminum, photo, 14 x 14 x 2 "

lead us up into the heaven and even quicker might show the way downwards. The traveling seems to last forever and a day, proceeding by delays in the twilight of the moon and her magic rituals. It is safe to keep in mind that it is not a solar region yet and for that matter to be content only with the dawning glimpses, anything more would be more dangerous than helpful. Through blending of the blendings, the moon creates the mirror of the mind, while simultaneously helps to polish it, suggesting self-examination. The solace is that while mirror forms changes, the consciousness behind it endures. The moon shines with a borrowed or reflective light. And man leaves not with its eerie shining alone. That has to be subdued before the intelligent clarity expressed by the sun symbol in many different beliefs. The similar meaning is

apparently behind the image of “a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet” (Rev. 12:1).

In the brief sketch of *Lunation*, we have chosen only some renditions of its “daydream” activity from the big corpus of selenic literature. Aside of its “mooniness,” we have to add that the gods and their ruling planets are just allegories of mythological and often philosophical truths, and they must be viewed on a symbolical level. Deus, whose root means day, pours the light into the darkness inherent in matter, and we can see all the object of the visible world. Even though the mystery of the light of the primary creation remains darkness to the finite intellect, the necessity of the universal ideas, often revealed in the images of different deities, is indispensable for the life of psyche; otherwise it suffers from atrophy or undernourishment. Just as the scenario seems to be ending, one suddenly realizes that the last line is only the beginning of a new phase of progression.

Footnotes

1. Albert Einstein, *The World As I See It* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1949), p. 5.
2. “The Gospel of Thomas” (7), *The Other Bible* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1984), p. 302.
- 3-8. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*: 3 III. 2. 60; 4 III. 2.13; 5 III. 2. 196; 6 I. 1.113; 7 V. 2. 350; 8 I. 1.43.
9. Genesis 5.24.
10. Albert Schweitzer, *J.S.Bach* (New York: Macmillan, 1964), vol.I, p.4.
11. Heinrich von Kleist, *Selected Prose*, translated by Peter Wortsman (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2010), p.278.
12. Gregory Bergman, *The Little Book of Bathroom Philosophy: Daily Wisdom from the Greatest Thinkers* (London, UK: Fair Wind Press, 2004), p. 137.
13. William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 5.IV. 103.
14. *The Concise Yoga Vasistha*, transl. by Swami Venkatesananda (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1984), pp. 359-360.
15. A.E. Waite and W.P. Swainson, *Three Famous Mystics. Saint-Martin, Boehme and Swedenborg* (MT: Kessinger Publishing, 1992), pp. 175-177.
16. C.G.Jung, *Aion. Collected Works* (PA: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX, 1975), vol. 9, part 1, p. 166.
17. Jacob Bohme, *Theosophia or the Highly Precious Gate of the Divine Intuition* (Washington: Sure Fire Press, 1988), p.9.
18. Voltaire, “Plato’s Dream” in *Candide, Zadig and Selected Stories*, transl. by Donald M. Frame (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University

Press, 1961), p. 225.

19. Ibid. p. 129.

20. Voltaire, *Philosophical Letters* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Co, 1961), p. 31.

21. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Studies in Pessimism*, translated by T. Bailey Saunders (London, UK: Swan Sonnenschein & Co, 1893), p.78.

22. In *Ulysses* (38) James Joyce produced the congested word “contransmagnificandjewbangtality” in contradiction to the doctrine of consubstantiation concerning the mystery of the Christian Eucharist, the bread and wine sacrament.

23. Wisdom 9:15.

24. Arthur Schopenhauer, “Complete Essays”, *Counsels and Maxims* (New York: Willey Book Co, 1942), p. 19.

25. College textbooks published by Prentice Hall, Simon & Schuster: John J. Macionis, *Sociology*, editions 1997 - 2012; Saul Kassin, *Psychology*, 1998; Jeffrey S. Nevid, *Abnormal Psychology in a Changing World*, 1996.

26. *The Hutchinson Dictionary of Biography* (Abingdon, Oxfordshire, UK: Helicon Publishing Ltd, 1994) p. 177.

27. *The Divine Pymander of Hermes*, translated by Dr. Everard (San Diego, CA: Wizard Bookshelf, 1985), “The Fourth Book, Called The Key”, §§ 39, 46, 93, pp. 24-30.

28. Plutarch, *The Face in the Moon* (Harvard University Press, The Loeb Classical Library, 1957), Vol. XII, 95.

29. Plato, *Timaeus* and *Republic*, book IX, 587-8.